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THE ROOTS OF THE MOUNTAINS WHEREIN IS TOLD SOMEWHAT OF THE LIVES OF THE MEN OF BURGDALE THEIR FRIENDS THEIR NEIGHBOURS THEIR FOEMEN AND THEIR FELLOWS IN ARMS

BY WILLIAM MORRIS

WHILES CARRIED O'ER THE IRON ROAD,
WE HURRY BY SOME FAIR ABODE;
THE GARDEN BRIGHT AMIDST THE HAY,
THE YELLOW WAIN UPON THE WAY,
THE DINING MEN, THE WIND THAT SWEEPS
LIGHT LOCKS FROM OFF THE SUN-SWEET HEAPS—
THE GABLE GREY, THE HOARY ROOF,
HERE NOW—AND NOW SO FAR ALOOF.
HOW SORELY THEN WE LONG TO STAY
AND MIDST ITS SWEETNESS WEAR THE DAY,
AND 'NEATH ITS CHANGING SHADOWS SIT,
AND FEEL OURSELVES A PART OF IT.
SUCH REST, SUCH STAY, I STROVE TO WIN
WITH THESE SAME LEAVES THAT LIE HEREIN.

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THE ROOTS OF THE MOUNTAINS

CHAPTER XXIX

THEY BRING THE RUNAWAYS TO BURGSTEAD

So now being out of the wood, they went peaceably and safely along the Portway, the Runaways mingling with the Dalesmen. Strange showed amidst the health and wealth of the Dale the rags and misery and nakedness of the thralls, like a dream amidst the trim gaiety of spring; and whomsoever they met, or came up with on the road, whatso his business might be, could not refrain himself from following them, but mingled with the men-at-arms, and asked them of the tidings; and when they heard who these poor people were, even delivered thralls of the Foemen, they were glad at heart and cried out for joy; and many of the women, nay, of the men also, when they first came across that misery from out the heart of their own pleasant life, wept for pity and love of the poor folk, now at last set free, and blessed the swords that should do the like by the whole people.

They went slowly as men began to gather about them; yea, some of the good folk that lived hard by must needs fare home to their houses to fetch cakes and wine for the guests; and they made them sit down and rest on the green grass by the side of the Portway,

and eat and drink to cheer their hearts ; others, women and young swains, while they rested went down into the meadows and plucked of the spring flowers, and twined them hastily with deft and well-wont fingers into chaplets and garlands for their heads and bodies. Thus indeed they covered their nakedness, till the lowering faces and weather-beaten skins of those hardly-entreated thralls looked grimly out from amidst the knots of cowslip and oxlip, and the branches of the milk-white blackthorn bloom, and the long trumpets of the daffodils, of the hue that wrappeth round the quill which the webster takes in hand when she would pleasure her soul with the sight of the yellow growing upon the dark green web.

So they went on again as the evening was waning, and when they were gotten within a furlong of the Gate, lo ! there was come the minstrelsy, the pipe and the tabor, the fiddle and the harp, and the folk that had learned to sing the sweetest, both men and women, and Redesman at the head of them all.

Then fell the throng into an ordered company ; first went the music, and then a score of Face-of-god's warriors with drawn swords and uplifted spears ; and then the flower-bedecked misery of the Runaways, men and women going together, gaunt, befouled and hollow-eyed, with here and there a flushed cheek or gleaming eye, or tear-bedewed face, as the joy and triumph of the eve pierced through their wonted weariness of grief ; then the rest of the warriors, and lastly the mingled crowd of Dalesfolk, tall men and fair women gaily arrayed, clean-faced, clear-skinned, and sleek-haired, with glancing eyes and ruddy lips.

And now Redesman turned about to the music and drew his bow across his fiddle, and the other bows ran out in concert, and the harps followed the story of them, and he lifted up his voice and sang the words

of an old song, and all the singers joined him and blended their voices with his. And these are some of the words which they sang:

Lo! here is Spring, and all we are living,
 We that were wan with Winter's fear;
Reach out your hands to her hands that are giving,
 Lest ye lose her love and the light of the year.

Many a morn did we wake to sorrow,
 When low on the land the cloud-wrath lay;
Many an eve we feared to-morrow,
 The unbegun unfinished day.

Ah we—we hoped not, and thou wert tardy;
 Nought wert thou helping; nought we prayed.
Where was the eager heart, the hardy?
 Where was the sweet-voiced unafraid?

But now thou lovest, now thou leadest,
 Where is gone the grief of our minds?
What was the word of the tale, that thou heedest
 E'en as the breath of the bygone winds?

Green and green is thy garment growing
 Over thy blossoming limbs beneath;
Up o'er our feet rise the blades of thy sowing,
 Pierced are our hearts with thine odorous breath.

But where art thou wending, thou new-comer?
 Hurrying on to the Courts of the Sun?
Where art thou now in the House of the Summer?
 Told are thy days and thy deed is done.

Spring has been here for us that are living
 After the days of Winter's fear;
Here in our hands is the wealth of her giving,
 The Love of the Earth, and the Light of the Year.

Thus came they to the Gate, and lo! the Bride thereby, leaning against a buttress, gazing with no dull eyes at the coming throng. She was now clad in her woman's attire again, to wit a light flame-coloured gown over a green kirtle; but she yet bore a gilded helm on her head and a sword girt to her side in token of her oath to the God. She had been in Hall-face's company in that last battle, and had done a man's service there, fighting very valiantly, but had not been hurt, and had come back to Burgstead when the shift of men was.

Now she drew herself up and stood a little way before the Gate and looked forth on the throng, and when her eyes beheld the Runaways amidst of the weaponed carles of Burgdale, her face flushed, and her eyes filled with tears as she stood, partly wondering, partly deeming what they were. She waited till Stone-face came by her, and then she took the old man by the sleeve, and drew him apart a little and said to him: "What meaneth this show, my friend? Who hath clad these folk thus strangely: and who be these three naked tall ones, so fierce-looking, but somewhat noble of aspect?"

For indeed those three men of the kindreds, when they had gotten into the Dale, and had rested them, and drunk a cup of wine, and when they had seen the chaplets and wreaths of the spring-flowers wherewith they were bedecked, and had smelt the sweet savour of them, fell to walking proudly, heeding not their nakedness; for no rag had they upon them save breech-clouts of deer-skin: they had changed weapons with the Burgdale carles; and one had gotten a great axe, which he bore over his shoulder, and the shaft thereof was all done about with copper; and another had shouldered a long heavy thrusting-spear, and the third, an exceeding tall man, bore a long broad-bladed

war-sword. Thus they went, brown of skin beneath their flower-garlands, their long hair bleached by the sun falling about their shoulders; high they strode amongst the shuffling carles and tripping women of the later-come thralls. But when they heard the music, and saw that they were coming to the Gate in triumph, strange thoughts of old memories swelled up in their hearts, and they refrained them not from weeping, for they felt that the joy of life had come back to them.

Nor must it be deemed that these were the only ones amongst the Runaways whose hearts were cheered and softened: already were many of them coming back to life, as they felt their worn bodies caressed by the clear soft air of Burgdale, and the sweetness of the flowers that hung about them, and saw all round about the kind and happy faces of their well-willers.

So Stone-face looked on the Bride as she stood with face yet tear-bedewed, awaiting his answer, and said:

"Daughter, thou sayest who clad these folk thus? It was misery that hath so dight them; and they are the images of what we shall be if we love foul life better than fair death, and so fall into the hands of the Felons, who were the masters of these men. As for the tall naked men, they are of our own blood, and kinsmen to Face-of-god's new friends; and they are of the best of the vanquished: it was in early days that they fled from thralldom; as we may have to do. Now, daughter, I bid thee be as joyous as thou art valiant, and then shall all be well."

Therewith she smiled on him, and he departed, and she stood a little while, as the throng moved on and was swallowed by the Gate, and looked after them; and for all her pity for the other folk, she thought chiefly of those fearless tall men who were of the blood of those with whom it was lawful to wed.

There she stood as the wind dried the tears upon her

cheeks, thinking of the sorrow which these folk had endured, and their stripes and mocking, their squalor and famine; and she wondered and looked on her own fair and shapely hands with the precious finger-rings thereon, and on the dainty cloth and trim broidery of her sleeve; and she touched her smooth cheek with the back of her hand, and smiled, and felt the spring sweet in her mouth, and its savour goodly in her nostrils; and therewith she called to mind the aspect of her lovely body, as whiles she had seen it imaged, all its full measure, in the clear pool at midsummer, or piece-meal, in the shining steel of the Westland mirror. She thought also with what joy she drew the breath of life, yea, even amidst of grief, and of how sweet and pure and well-nurtured she was, and how well beloved of many friends and the whole folk, and she set all this beside those woeful bodies and lowering faces, and felt shame of her sorrow of heart, and the pain it had brought to her; and ever amidst shame and pity of all that misery rose up before her the images of those tall fierce men, and it seemed to her as if she had seen something like to them in some dream or imagination of her mind.

So came the Burgdalers and their guests into the street of Burgstead amidst music and singing; and the throng was great there. Then Face-of-god bade make a ring about the strangers, and they did so, and he and the Runaways alone were in the midst of it; and he spake in a loud voice and said:

"Men of the Dale and the Burg, these folk whom here ye see in such a sorry plight are they whom our deadly foes have rejoiced to torment; let us therefore rejoice to cherish them. Now let those men come forth who deem that they have enough and more, so that they may each take into their houses some two or three of these friends such as would be fain to be together. And

since I am War-leader, and have the right hereto, I will first choose them whom I will lead into the House of the Face. And lo you! will I have this man (and he laid his hand on Dallach), who is he whom I first came across, and who found us all these others, and next I will have yonder tall carles, the three of them, because I perceive them to be men meet to be with a War-leader, and to follow him in battle."

Therewith he drew the three Men of the Wolf towards him, but Dallach already was standing beside him. And folk rejoiced in Face-of-god.

But the Bride came forward next, and spake to him meekly and simply:

"War-leader, let me have of the women those who need me most, that I may bring them to the House of the Steer, and try if there be not some good days yet to be found for them, wherein they shall but remember the past grief as an ugly dream."

Then Face-of-god looked on her, and him-seemed he had never seen her so fair; and all the shame wherewith he had beheld her of late was gone from him, and his heart ran over with friendly love towards her as she looked into his face with kindly eyes; and he said:

"Kinswoman, take thy choice as thy kindness biddeth, and happy shall they be whom thou choosest."

She bowed her head soberly, and chose from among the guests four women of the saddest and most grievous, and no man of their kindred spake for going along with them; then she went her ways home, leading one of them by the hand, and strange was it to see those twain going through sun and shade together, that poor wretch along with the goodliest of women.

Then came forward one after other of the worthy goodmen of the Dale, and especially such as were old, and they led away one one man, and another two,

and another three, and often would a man crave to go with a woman or a woman with a man, and it was not gainsaid them. So were all the guests apportioned, and ill-content were those goodmen that had to depart without a guest; and one man would say to another: "Such-an-one, be not downcast; this guest shall be between us, if he will, and shall dwell with thee and me month about; but this first month with me, since I was first comer." And so forth was it said.

Now to prevent the time to come, it may be said about the Runaways, that when they had been a little while amongst the Burgdalers, well fed and well clad and kindly cherished, it was marvellous how they were bettered in aspect of body, and it began to be seen of them that they were well-favoured people, and divers of the women exceeding goodly, black-haired and grey-eyed, and very clear-skinned and white-skinned; most of them were young, and the oldest had not seen above forty winters. They of Rosedale, and especially such as had first fled away to the wood, were very soon seen to be merry and kindly folk; but they who had been longest in captivity, and notably those from Silverdale who were not of the kindreds, were for a long time sullen and heavy, and it availed little to trust to them for the doing of work; albeit they would follow about their friends of Burgdale with the love of a dog; also they were, divers of them, somewhat thievish, and if they lacked anything would liefer take it by stealth than ask for it; which forsooth the Burgdale men took not amiss, but deemed of it as a jest rather.

Very few of the Runaways had any will to fare back to their old homes, or indeed could be got to go into the wood, or, after a day or two, to say any word of Rosedale or Silverdale. In this and other matters the

Burgdalers dealt with them as with children who must have their way; for they deemed that their guests had much time to make up; also they were well content when they saw how goodly they were, for these Dalesmen loved to see men goodly of body and of a cheerful countenance.

As for Dallach and the three Silverdale men of the kindred, they went gladly whereas the Burgdale men would have them; and half a score others took weapons in their hands when the war was foughten: concerning which more hereafter.

But on the even whereof the tale now tells, Face-of-god and Stone-face and their company met after nightfall in the Hall of the Face clad in glorious raiment, and therewith were Dallach and the men of Silverdale, washen and docked of their long hair, after the fashion of warriors who bear the helm; and they were clad in gay attire, with battle-swords girt to their sides and gold rings on their arms. Somewhat stern and sad-eyed were those Silverdalers yet, though they looked on those about them kindly and courteously when they met their eyes; and Face-of-god yearned towards them when he called to mind the beauty and wisdom and loving-kindness of the Sun-beam. They were, as aforesaid, strong men and tall, and one of them taller than any amidst that house of tall men. Their names were Wolf-stone, the tallest, and God-swain, and Spear-fist; and God-swain the youngest was of thirty winters, and Wolf-stone of forty. They came into the Hall in such wise, that when they were washed and attired, and all men were assembled in the Hall, and the Alderman and the chieftains sitting on the dais, Face-of-god brought them in from the out-bower, holding Dallach by the right hand and Wolf-stone by the left; and he looked but a stripling beside that huge man.

And when the men in the Hall beheld such goodly warriors, and remembered their grief late past, they all stood up and shouted for joy of them. But Face-of-god passed up the Hall with them, and stood before the dais and said:

"O Alderman of the Dale and Chief of the House of the Face, here I bring to you the foes of our foemen, whom I have met in the Wild-wood, and bidden to our House; and meseemeth they will be our friends, and stand beside us in the day of battle. Therefore I say, take these guests and me together, or put us all to the door together; and if thou wilt take them, then show them to such places as thou deemest meet."

Then stood up the Alderman and said:

"Men of Silverdale and Rosedale, I bid you welcome! Be ye our friends, and abide here with us as long as seemeth good to you, and share in all that is ours. Son Face-of-god, show these warriors to seats on the dais beside thee, and cherish them as well as thou knowest how."

Then Face-of-god brought them up on to the dais and sat down on the right hand of his father, with Dallach on his right hand, and then Wolf-stone out from him; then sat Stone-face, that there might be a man of the Dale to talk with them and serve them; and on his right hand first Spear-fist and then God-swain. And when they were all sat down, and the meat was on the board, Iron-face turned to his son Face-of-god and took his hand, and said in a loud voice, so that many might hear him:

"Son Face-of-god, son Gold-mane, thou bearest with thee both ill luck and good. Erewhile, when thou wanderedst out into the Wild-wood, seeking thou knewest not what from out of the Land of Dreams, thou didst but bring aback to us grief and shame;

but now that thou hast gone forth with the neighbours seeking thy foemen, thou hast come aback to us with thine hands full of honour and joy for us, and we thank thee for thy gifts, and I call thee a lucky man. Herewith, kinsman, I drink to thee and the lasting of thy luck."

Therewith he stood up and drank the health of the War-leader and the Guests: and all men were exceeding joyous thereat, when they called to mind his wrath at the Gate-thing, and they shouted for gladness as they drank that health, and the feast became exceeding merry in the House of the Face; and as to the war to come, it seemed to them as if it were over and done in all triumph.

CHAPTER XXX

HALL-FACE GOETH TOWARD ROSEDALE

On the morrow Face-of-god took counsel with Hall-face and Stone-face as to what were best to be done, and they sat on the dais in the Hall to talk it over.

Short was the time that had worn since that day in Shadowy Vale, for it was but eight days since then; yet so many things had befallen in that time, and, to speak shortly, the outlook for the Burgdalers had changed so much, that the time seemed long to all the three, and especially to Face-of-god.

It was yet twenty days till the Great Folk-mote should be holden, and to Hall-face the time seemed long enough to do somewhat, and he deemed it were good to gather force and fall on the Dusky Men in Rosedale, since now they had gotten men who could lead them the nighest way and by the safest passes, and who knew all the ways of the foemen. But to

Stone-face this rede seemed not so good; for they would have to go and come back, and fight and conquer, in less time than twenty days, or be belated of the Folk-mote, and meanwhile much might happen.

"For," said Stone-face, "we may deem the fighting-men of Rosedale to be little less than one thousand, and however we fall on them, even if it be unawares at first, they shall fight stubbornly; so that we may not send against them many less than they be, and that shall strip Burgdale of its fighting-men, so that whatever befalls, we that be left shall have to bide at home."

Now was Face-of-god of the same mind as Stone-face: and he said moreover: "When we go to Rosedale we must abide there a while unless we be overthrown. For if ye conquer it and come away at once, presently shall the tidings come to the ears of the Dusky Men in Silver-dale, and they shall join themselves to those of Rosedale who have fled before you, and between them they shall destroy the unhappy people therein: for ye cannot take them all away with you: and that shall they do all the more now, when they look to have new thralls in Burgdale, both men and women. And this we may not suffer, but must abide till we have met all our foemen and have overcome them, so that the poor folk there shall be safe from them till they have learned how to defend their dale. Now my rede is, that we send out the War-arrow at once up and down the Dale, and to the Shepherds and Woodlanders, and appoint a day for the Muster and Weapon-show of all our Folk, and that day to be the day before the Spring Market, that is to say, four days before the Great Folk-mote, and meantime that we keep sure watch about the border of the wood, and now and again scour the wood, so as to clear the Dale of their wandering bands."

"Yea," said Hall-face; "and I pray thee, brother,

let me have an hundred of men and thy Dallach, and let us go somewhat deep into the wood towards Rosedale, and see what we may come across; peradventure it might be something better than hart or wild-swine."

Said Face-of-god: "I see no harm therein, if Dallach goeth with thee freely; for I will have no force put on him or any other of the Runaways. Yet meseemeth it were not ill for thee to find the road to Rosedale; for I have it in my mind to send a company thither to give those Rosedale man-quellers somewhat to do at home when we fall upon Silverdale. Therefore go find Dallach, and get thy men together at once; for the sooner thou art gone on thy way the better. But this I bid thee, go no further than three days out, that ye may be back home betimes."

At this word Hall-face's eyes gleamed with joy, and he went out from the Hall straightway and sought Dallach, and found him at the Gate. Iron-face had given him a new sword, a good one, and had bidden him call it Thicket-clearer, and he would not leave it any moment of the day or night, but would lay it under his pillow at night as a child does with a new toy; and now he was leaning against a buttress and drawing the said sword half out of the scabbard and poring over its blade, which was indeed fair enough, being wrought with dark grey waving lines like the eddies of the Weltering Water.

So Hall-face greeted him, and smiled and said:

"Guest, if thou wilt, thou mayst take that new blade of my father's work which thou lovest so, a journey which shall rejoice it."

"Yea," said Dallach, "I suppose that thou wouldest fare on thy brother's footsteps, and deemest that I am the man to lead thee on the road, and even farther than he went; and though it might be thought by some that I have seen enough of Rosedale and the parts

thereabout for one while, yet will I go with thee; for now am I a man again, body and soul."

And therewith he drew Thicket-clearer right out of his sheath and waved him in the air. And Hall-face was glad of him and said he was well apaid of his help. So they went away together to gather men, and on the morrow Hall-face departed and went into the Wild-wood with Dallach and an hundred and two score men.

But as for Face-of-god, he fared up and down the Dale following the War-arrow, and went into all houses, and talked with the folk, both young and old, men and women, and told them closely all that had betid and all that was like to betide; and he was well pleased with that which he saw and heard; for all took his words well, and were nought afeard or dismayed by the tidings; and he saw that they would not hang aback. Meantime the days wore, and Hall-face came not back till the seventh day, and he brought with him twelve more Runaways, of whom five were women. But he had lost four men, and had with him Dallach and five others of the Dalesmen borne upon litters sore hurt; and this was his story:

They got to the Burg of the Runaways on the forenoon of the third day, and thereby came on five carles of the Runaways—men who had missed meeting Dallach that other day, but knew what had been done; for one of them had been sick and could not come with him, and he had told the others: so now they were hanging about the Burg of the Runaways hoping somewhat that he might come again; and they met the Burgdalers full of joy, and brought them trouts that they had caught in the river.

As for the other Runaways, namely, five women and two more carles—they had gotten them close to the entrance into Silverdale, where by night and cloud

they came on a campment of the Dusky Men, who were leading home these seven poor wretches, runaways whom they had caught, that they might slay them most evilly in Rose-stead. So Hall-face fell on the Dusky Men, and delivered their captives, but slew not all the foe, and they that fled brought pursuers on them who came up with them the next day, so near was Rosedale, though they made all diligence homeward. The Burgdalers must needs turn and fight with those pursuers, and at last they drave them aback so that they might go on their ways home. They let not the grass grow beneath their feet thereafter, till they were assured by meeting a band of the Woodlanders, who had gone forth to help them, and with whom they rested a little. But neither so were they quite done with the foemen, who came upon them next day a very many: these however they and the Woodlanders, who were all fresh and unwounded and very valiant, speedily put to the worse; and so they came on to Burgstead, leaving those of them who were sorest hurt to be tended by the Woodlanders at Carlstead, who, as might be looked for, dealt with them very lovingly.

It was in the first fight that they suffered that loss of slain and wounded; and therein the newly delivered thralls fought valiantly against their masters: as for Dallach, it was no marvel, said Hall-face, that he was hurt; but rather a marvel that he was not slain, so little he recked of point and edge, if he might but slay the foemen.

Such was Hall-face's tale; and Face-of-god deemed that he had done unwisely to let him go that journey; for the slaying of a few Dusky Men was but a light gain to set against the loss of so many Burgdalers; yet was he glad of the deliverance of those Runaways, and deemed it a gain indeed. But henceforth would he

hold all still till he should have tidings of Folk-might ; so nought was done thereafter save the warding of the Dale, from the country of the Shepherds to the Waste above the Eastern passes.

But Face-of-god himself went up amongst the Shepherds, and abode with a goodman hight Hound-under-Greenbury, who gathered to him the folk from the country-side, and they went up on to Greenbury, and sat on the green grass while he spoke with them and told them, as he had told the others, what had been done and what should be done. And they heard him gladly, and he deemed that there would be no blenching in them, for they were all in one tale to live and die with their friends of Burgdale, and they said that they would have no other word save that to bear to the Great Folk-mote.

So he went away well-pleased, and he fared on thence to the Woodlanders, and guested at the house of a valiant man hight Wargrove, who on the morrow morn called the folk together to a green lawn of the Wild-wood, so that there was scarce a soul of them that was not there. Then he laid the whole matter before them ; and if the Dalesmen had been merry and ready, and the Shepherds stout-hearted and friendly, yet were the Woodlanders more eager still, so that every hour seemed long to them till they stood in their war-gear ; and they told him that now at last was the hour drawing nigh which they had dreamed of, but had scarce dared to hope for, when the lost way should be found, and the crooked made straight, and that which had been broken should be mended ; that their meat and drink, and sleeping and waking, and all that they did were now become to them but the means of living till the day was come whereon the two remnants of the children of the Wolf should meet and become one Folk to live or die together.

Then went Face-of-god back to Burgstead again, and as he stood anigh the Thing-stead once more, and looked down on the Dale as he had beheld it last autumn, he bethought him that with all that had been done and all that had been promised, the earth was clearing of her trouble, and that now there was nought betwixt him and the happy days of life which the Dale should give to the dwellers therein, save the gathering hosts of the battle-field and the day when the last word should be spoken and the first stroke smitten. So he went down on to the Portway well content.

Thereafter till the day of the Weapon-show there is nought to tell of, save that Dallach and the other wounded men began to grow whole again; and all men sat at home, or went on the woodland ward, expecting great tidings after the holding of the Folk-mote.

CHAPTER XXXI

OF THE WEAPON-SHOW OF THE MEN OF BURGDALE AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS

Now on the day appointed for the Weapon-show came the Folk flock-meal to the great and wide meadow that was cleft by Wildlake as it ran to join the Weltering Water. Early in the morning, even before sunrise, had the wains full of women and children begun to come thither. Also there came little horses and asses from the Shepherd country with one or two or three damsels or children sitting on each, and by wain-side or by beast strode the men of the house, merry and fair in their war-gear. The Woodlanders, moreover, man and woman, elder and swain and young damsel, streamed out of the wood from Carl-

stead, eager to make the day begin before the sunrise, and end before his setting.

Then all men fell to pitching of tents and tilting over of wains; for the April sun was hot in the Dale, and when he arose the meads were gay with more than the spring flowers; for the tents and the tilts were stained and broidered with many colours, and there was none who had not furbished up his war-gear so that all shone and glittered. And many wore gay surcoats over their armour, and the women were clad in all their bravery, and the Houses mostly of a suit; for one bore blue and another corn-colour, and another green, and another brazil, and so forth, and all gleaming and glowing with broidery of gold and bright hues. But the women of the Shepherds were all clad in white, embroidered with green boughs and red blossoms, and the Woodland women wore dark red kirtles. Moreover, the women had set garlands of flowers on their heads and the helms of the men, and for the most part they were slim of body and tall and light-limbed, and as dainty to look upon as the willow-boughs that waved on the brook-side.

Thither had the goodmen who were guesting the Runaways brought their guests, even now much bettered by their new soft days; and much the poor folk marvelled at all this joyance, and they scarce knew where they were; but to some it brought back to their minds days of joyance before the thralldom and all that they had lost, so that their hearts were heavy a while, till they saw the warriors of the kindreds streaming into the mead and bethought them why they carried steel.

Now by then the sun was fully up there was a great throng on the Portway, and this was the folk of the Burg on their way to the Weapon-mead. The men-at-arms were in the midst of the throng, and at the

head of them was the War-leader, with the banner of the Face before him, wherein was done the image of the God with the ray-ringed head. But at the rearward of the warriors went the Alderman and the Burg-wardens, before whom was borne the banner of the Burg pictured with the Gate and its Towers; but in the midst betwixt those two was the banner of the Steer, a white beast on a green field.

So when the Dale-wardens who were down in the meadow heard the music and beheld who were coming, they bade the companies of the Dale and the Shepherds and the Woodlanders who were down there to pitch their banners in a half circle about the ingle of the meadow which was made by the streams of Wildlake and the Weltering Water, and gather to them to be ordered there under their leaders of scores and half-hundreds and hundreds; and even so they did. But the banners of the Dale without the Burg were the Bridge, and the Bull, and the Vine, and the Sickle. And the Shepherds had three banners, to wit Greenbury, and the Fleece, and the Thorn.

As for the Woodlanders, they said that they were abiding their great banner, but it should come in good time; "and meantime," said they, "here are the war-tokens that we shall fight under; for they are good enough banners for us poor men, the remnant of the valiant of time past." Therewith they showed two great spears, and athwart the one was tied an arrow, its point dipped in blood, its feathers singed with fire; and they said, "This is the banner of the War-shaft."

On the other spear there was nought; but the head thereof was great and long, and they had so burnished the steel that the sun smote out a ray of light from it, so that it might be seen from afar. And they said: "This is the Banner of the Spear! Down yonder

where the ravens are gathering ye shall see a banner flying over us. There shall fall many a mother's son."

Smiled the Dale-wardens, and said that these were good banners to fight under; and those that stood nearby shouted for the valiancy of the Woodland Carles.

Now the Dale-wardens went to the entrance from the Portway to the meadow, and there met the Men of the Burg, and two of them went one on either side of the War-leader to show him to his seat, and the others abode till the Alderman and Burg-wardens came up, and then joined themselves to them, and the horns blew up both in the meadow and on the road, and the new-comers went their ways to their appointed places amidst the shouts of the Dalesmen; and the women and children and old men from the Burg followed after, till all the mead was covered with bright raiment and glittering gear, save within the ring of men at the further end.

So came the War-leader to his seat of green turf raised in the ingle aforesaid; and he stood beside it till the Alderman and Wardens had taken their places on a seat behind him raised higher than his; below him on the step of his seat sat the Scrivener with his pen and ink-horn and scroll of parchment, and men had brought him a smooth shield whereon to write.

On the left side of Face-of-god stood the men of the Face all glittering in their arms, and amongst them were Wolf-stone and his two fellows, but Dallach was not yet whole of his hurts. On his right were the folk of the House of the Steer: the leader of that House was an old white-bearded man, grandfather of the Bride, for her father was dead; and who but the Bride herself stood beside him in her glorious war-gear, looking as if she were new come from the City of the Gods, thought most men; but those who beheld her

closely deemed that she looked heavy-eyed and haggard, as if she were aweary. Nevertheless, wheresoever she passed, and whosoever looked on her (and all men looked on her), there arose a murmur of praise and love; and the women, and especially the young ones, said how fair her deed was, and how meet she was for it; and some of them were for doing on war-gear and faring to battle with the carles; and of these some were sober and solemn, as was well seen afterwards, and some spake lightly: some also fell to boasting of how they could run and climb and swim and shoot in the bow, and fell to baring of their arms to show how strong they were: and indeed they were no weaklings, though their arms were fair.

There then stood the ring of men, each company under its banner; and beyond them stood the women and children and men unmeet for battle; and beyond them again the tilted wains and the tents.

Now Face-of-god sat him down on the turf-seat with his bright helm on his head and his naked sword across his knees, while the horns blew up loudly, and when they had done, the elder of the Dale-wardens cried out for silence. Then again arose Face-of-god and said:

"Men of the Dale, and ye friends of the Shepherds, and ye, O valiant Woodlanders; we are not assembled here to take counsel, for in three days' time shall the Great Folk-mote be holden, whereat shall be counsel enough. But since I have been appointed your Chief and War-leader, till such time as the Folk-mote shall either yeasay or naysay my leadership, I have sent for you that we may look each other in the face and number our host and behold our weapons, and see if we be meet for battle and for the dealing with a great host of foemen. For now no longer can it be said that we are going to war, but rather that war is on our borders, and we are blended with it; as many

have learned to their cost; for some have been slain and some sorely hurt. Therefore I bid you now, all ye that are weaponed, wend past us that the tale of you may be taken. But first let every hundred-leader and half-hundred-leader and score-leader make sure that he hath his tale aright, and give his word to the captain of his banner that he in turn may give it out to the Scrivener with his name and the House and Company that he leadeth."

So he spake and sat him adown; and the horns blew again in token that the companies should go past; and the first that came was Hall-ward of the House of the Steer, and the first of those that went after him was the Bride, going as if she were his son.

So he cried out his name, and the name of his House, and said, "An hundred and a half," and passed forth, his men following him in most goodly array. Each man was girt with a good sword and bore a long heavy spear over his shoulder, save a score who bare bows; and no man lacked a helm, a shield, and a coat of fence.

Then came a goodly man of thirty winters, and stayed before the Scrivener and cried out:

"Write down the House of the Bridge of the Upper Dale at one hundred, and War-well their leader."

And he strode on, and his men followed clad and weaponed like those of the Steer, save that some had axes hanging to their girdles instead of swords; and most bore casting-spears instead of the long spears, and half a score were bowmen.

Then came Fox of Upton leading the men of the Bull of Mid-dale, an hundred and a half lacking two; very great and tall were his men, and they also bore long spears, and one score and two were bowmen.

Then Fork-beard of Lea, a man well on in years, led on the men of the Vine, an hundred and a half and five men thereto; two score of them bare bow in hand

and were girt with sword; the rest bore their swords naked in their right hands, and their shields (which were but small bucklers) hanging at their backs, and in the left hand each bore two casting-spears. With these went two doughty women-at-arms among the bowmen, tall and well-knit, already growing brown with the spring sun, for their work lay among the stocks of the vines on the southward-looking bents.

Next came a tall young man, yellow-haired, with a thin red beard, and gave himself out for Red-beard of the Knolls; he bore his father's name, as the custom of their house was, but the old man, who had long been head man of the House of the Sickle, was late dead in his bed, and the young man had not seen twenty winters. He bade the Scrivener write the tale of the Men of the Sickle at an hundred and a half, and his folk fared past the War-leader joyously, being one half of them bowmen; and fell shooters they were; the other half were girt with swords, and bore withal long ashen staves armed with great blades curved inwards, which weapon they called heft-sax.

All these bands, as the name and the tale of them was declared were greeted with loud shouts from their fellows and the bystanders; but now arose a greater shout still, as Stone-face, clad in goodly glittering array, came forth and said:

"I am Stone-face of the House of the Face, and I bring with me two hundreds of men with their best war-gear and weapons: write it down, Scrivener!"

And he strode on like a young man after those who had gone past, and after him came the tall Hall-face and his men, a gallant sight to see: two score bowmen girt with swords, and the others with naked swords waving aloft, and each bearing two casting-spears in his left hand.

Then came a man of middle age, broad-shouldered, yellow-haired, blue-eyed, of wide and ruddy countenance, and after him a goodly company; and again great was the shout that went up to the heavens; for he said:

"Scrivener, write down that Hound-under-Greenbury, from amongst the dwellers in the hills where the sheep feed, leadeth the men who go under the banner of Greenbury, to the tale of an hundred and four score."

Therewith he passed on, and his men followed, stout, stark, and merry-faced, girt with swords, and bearing over their shoulders long-staved axes, and spears not so long as those which the Dalesman bore; and they had but a half score of arrow-shot with them.

Next came a young man, blue-eyed also, with hair the colour of flax on the distaff, broad-faced and short-nosed, low of stature, but very strong-built, who cried out in a loud, cheerful voice:

"I am Strongitharm of the Shepherds, and these valiant men are of the Fleece and the Thorn blended together, for so they would have it; and their tale is one hundred and two score and ten."

Then the men of those kindreds went past merry and shouting, and they were clad and weaponed like to them of Greenbury, but had with them a score of bowmen. And all these Shepherd-folk wore over their hauberks white woollen surcoats broidered with green and red.

Now again uprose the cry, and there stood before the War-leader a very tall man of fifty winters, dark-faced and grey-eyed, and he spake slowly and somewhat softly, and said:

"War-leader, this is Red-wolf of the Woodlanders leading the men who go under the sign of the War-shaft, to the number of an hundred and two."

Then he passed on, and his men after him, tall, lean,

and silent amidst the shouting. All these men bare bows, for they were keen hunters; each had at his girdle a little axe and a wood-knife, and some had long swords withal. They wore, everyone of the carles, short green surcoats over their coats of fence; but amongst them were three women who bore like weapons to the men, but were clad in red kirtles under their hauberks, which were of good ring-mail gleaming over them from throat to knee.

Last came another tall man, but young, of twenty-five winters, and spake:

"Scrivener, I am Bears-bane of the Woodlanders, and these that come after me wend under the sign of the Spear, and they are of the tale of one hundred and seven."

And he passed by at once, and his men followed him, clad and weaponed no otherwise than they of the War-shaft, and with them were two women.

Now went all those companies back to their banners, and stood there; and there arose among the bystanders much talk concerning the Weapon-show, and who were the best arrayed of the Houses. And of the old men, some spake of past weapon-shows which they had seen in their youth, and they set them beside this one, and praised and blamed. So it went on a little while till the horns blew again, and once more there was silence. Then arose Face-of-god and said:

"Men of Burgdale, and ye Shepherd-folk, and ye of the Woodland, now shall ye wot how many weaponed men we may bring together for this war. Scrivener, arise and give forth the tale of the companies, as they have been told unto you."

Then the Scrivener stood up on the turf-bench beside Face-of-god, and spake in a loud voice, reading from his scroll:

"Of the Men of Burgdale there have passed by me

nine hundreds and six; of the Shepherds three hundreds and eight and ten; and of the Woodlanders two hundreds and nine; so that all told our men are fourteen hundreds and thirty and three."

Now in those days men reckoned by long hundreds, so that the whole tale of the host was one thousand, five hundred, and four score and one, telling the tale in short hundreds.

When the tale had been given forth and heard, men shouted again, and they rejoiced that they were so many. For it exceeded the reckoning which the Alderman had given out at the Gate-thing. But Face-of-god said:

"Neighbours, we have held our Weapon-show; but now hold you ready, each man, for the Hosting toward very battle; for belike within seven days shall the leaders of hundreds and twenties summon you to be ready in arms to take whatso fortune may befall. Now is sundered the Weapon-show. Be ye as merry to-day as your hearts bid you to be."

Therewith he came down from his seat with the Alderman and the Wardens, and they mingled with the good folk of the Dale and the Shepherds and the Woodlanders, and merry was their converse there. It yet lacked an hour of noon; so presently they fell to and feasted in the green meadow, drinking from wain to wain and from tent to tent; and thereafter they played and sported in the meads, shooting at the butts and wrestling, and trying other masteries. Then they fell to dancing one and all, and so at last to supper on the green grass in great merriment. Nor might you have known from the demeanour of any that any threat of evil overhung the Dale. Nay, so glad were they, and so friendly, that you might rather have deemed that this was the land whereof tales tell, wherein people die not, but live for ever, without

growing any older than when they first come thither, unless they be born into the land itself, and then they grow into fair manhood, and so abide. In sooth, both the land and the folk were fair enough to be that land and the folk thereof.

But a little after sunset they sundered, and some fared home; but many of them abode in the tents and tilted wains, because the morrow was the first day of the Spring Market: and already were some of the Westland chapmen come; yea, two of them were with the bystanders in the meadow; and more were looked for ere the night was far spent.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE MEN OF SHADOWY VALE COME TO THE SPRING MARKET AT BURGSTEAD

On the morrow betimes in the morning the Westland chapmen, who were now all come, went out from the House of the Face, where they were ever wont to be lodged, and set up their booths adown the street betwixt gate and bridge. Gay was the show; for the booths were tilted over with painted cloths, and the merchants themselves were clad in long gowns of fine cloth; scarlet, and blue, and white, and green, and black, with broidered welts of gold and silver; and their knaves were gaily attired in short coats of divers hues, with silver rings about their arms, and short swords girt to their sides. People began to gather about these chapmen at once when they fell to opening their bales and their packs, and unloading their wains. There had they iron, both in pigs and forged scrap and nails; steel they had, and silver, both in ingots and vessel; pearls from over sea; cinnabar and other colours for

staining, such as were not in the mountains: madder from the marshes, and purple of the sea, and scarlet grain from the holm-oaks by its edge, and woad from the deep clayey fields of the plain; silken thread also from the outer ocean, and rare webs of silk, and jars of olive oil, and fine pottery, and scented woods, and sugar of the cane. But gold they had none with them, for that they took there; and for weapons, save a few silver-gilt toys, they had no market.

So presently they fell to chaffer; for the carles brought them little bags of the river-borne gold, so that the weights and scales were at work; others had with them scrolls and tallies to tell the number of the beasts which they had to sell, and the chapmen gave them wares therefor without beholding the beasts; for they wotted that the Dalesmen lied not in chaffer. While the day was yet young withal came the Dalesmen from the mid and nether Dale with their wares and set up their booths; and they had with them flasks and kegs of the wine which they had to sell; and bales of the good winter-woven cloth, some grey, some dyed, and pieces of fine linen; and blades of swords, and knives, and axes of such fashion as the Westland men used; and golden cups and chains, and fair rings set with mountain-blue stones, and copper bowls, and vessels gilt and parcel-gilt, and mountain-blue for staining. There were men of the Shepherds also with such fleeces as they could spare from the daily chaffer with the neighbours. And of the Woodlanders were four carles and a woman with peltries and dressed deer-skins, and a few pieces of well-carven wood-work for bedsteads and chairs and such like.

Soon was the Burg thronged with folk in all its open places, and all were eager and merry, and it could not have been told from their demeanour and countenance that the shadow of a grievous trouble hung over them.

True it was that every man of the Dale and the neighbours was girt with his sword, or bore spear or axe or other weapon in his hand, and that most had their bucklers at their backs and their helms on their heads; but this was ever their custom at all meetings of men, not because they dreaded war or were fain of strife, but in token that they were free men, from whom none should take the weapons without battle.

Such were the folk of the land: as for the chapmen, they were well-spoken and courteous, and blithe with the folk, as they well might be, for they had good pennyworths of them; yet they dealt with them without using measureless lying, as behoved folk dealing with simple and proud people; and many was the tale they told of the tidings of the Cities and the Plain.

There amongst the throng was the Bride in her maiden's attire, but girt with the sword, going from booth to booth with her guests of the Runaways, and doing those poor people what pleasure she might, and giving them gifts from the goods there, such as they set their hearts on. And the more part of the Runaways were about among the people of the Fair; but Dallach, being still weak, sat on a bench by the door of the House of the Face looking on well-pleased at all the stir of folk.

Hall-face was gone on the woodland ward; while Face-of-god went among the folk in his most glorious attire; but he soon betook him to the place of meeting without the Gate, where Stone-face and some of the elders were sitting along with the Alderman, beside whom sat the head man of the merchants, clad in a gown of fine scarlet embroidered with the best work of the Dale, with a golden chaplet on his head, and a good sword, golden-hilted, by his side, all which the Alderman had given to him that morning. These chiefs were talking together concerning the tidings of the

Plain, and many a tale the guest told to the Dalesmen, some true, some false. For there had been battles down there, and the fall of kings, and destruction of people, as oft befalleth in the guileful Cities. He told them also, in answer to their story of the Dusky Men, of how men even such-like, but riding on horses, or drawn in wains, an host not to be numbered, had erewhile overthrown the host of the Cities of the Plain, and had wrought evils scarce to be told of; and how they had piled up the skulls of slaughtered folk into great hills beside the city-gates, so that the sun might no longer shine into the streets; and how because of the death and the rapine, grass had grown in the kings' chambers, and the wolves had chased deer in the Temples of the Gods.

"But," quoth he, "I know you, bold tillers of the soil, valiant scourers of the Wild-wood, that the worst that can befall you will be to die under shield, and that ye shall suffer no torment of the thrall. May the undying Gods bless the threshold of this Gate, and oft may I come hither to taste of your kindness! May your race, the uncorrupt, increase and multiply, till your valiant men and clean maidens make the bitter sweet and purify the earth!"

He spake smooth-tongued and smiling, handling the while the folds of his fine scarlet gown, and belike he meant a full half of what he said; for he was a man very eloquent of speech, and had spoken with kings, uncowed and pleased with his speaking; and for that cause and his riches had he been made chief of the chapmen. As he spake the heart of Face-of-god swelled within him, and his cheek flushed; but Iron-face sat up straight and proud, and a light smile played about his face, as he said gravely:

"Friend of the Westland, I thank thee for the blessing and the kind word. Such as we are, we

are; nor do I deem that the very Gods shall change us. And if they will be our friends, it is well; for we desire nought of them save their friendship; and if they will be our foes, that also shall we bear; nor will we curse them for doing that which their lives bid them to do. What sayest thou, Face-of-god, my son?"

"Yea, father," said Face-of-god, "I say that the very Gods, though they slay me, cannot unmake my life that has been. If they do deeds, yet shall we also do."

The Outlander smiled as they spake, and bowed his head to Iron-face and Face-of-god, and wondered at their pride of heart, marvelling what they would say to the great men of the Cities if they should meet them.

But as they sat a-talking, there came two men running to them from the Portway, their weapons all clattering upon them, and they heard withal the sound of a horn winded not far off very loud and clear; and the Chapman's cheek paled: for in sooth he doubted that war was at hand, after all he had heard of the Dalesmen's dealings with the Dusky Men. And all battle was loathsome to him, nor for all the gain of his chaffer had he come into the Dale, had he known that war was looked for.

But the chiefs of the Dalesmen stirred not, nor changed countenance; and some of the goodmen who were in the street nigh the Gate came forth to see what was toward; for they also had heard the voice of the horn.

Then one of those messengers came up breathless, and stood before the chiefs, and said:

"New tidings, Alderman; here be weaponed strangers come into the Dale!"

The Alderman smiled on him and said: "Yea, son, and are they a great host of men?"

"Nay," said the man, "not above a score as I deem, and there is a woman with them."

"Then shall we abide them here," said the Alderman, "and thou mightest have saved thy breath, and suffered them to bring tidings of themselves; since they may scarce bring us war. For no man desireth certain and present death; and that is all that such a band may win at our hands in battle to-day; and all who come in peace are welcome to us. What like are they to behold?"

Said the man: "They are tall men gloriously attired, so that they seem like kinsmen of the Gods; and they bear flowering boughs in their hands."

The Alderman laughed, and said: "If they be Gods they are welcome indeed; and they shall grow the wiser for their coming; for they shall learn how guest-fain the Burgdale men may be. But if, as I deem, they be like unto us, and but the children of the Gods, then are they as welcome, and it may be more so, and our greeting to them shall be as their greeting to us would be."

Even as he spake the horn was winded nearer yet, and more loudly, and folk came pouring out of the Gate to learn the tidings. Presently the strangers came from off the Portway into the space before the Gate; and their leader was a tall and goodly man of some thirty winters, in glorious array, helm on head and sword by side, his surcoat green and flowery like the spring meads. In his right hand he held a branch of the blossomed black-thorn (for some was yet in blossom), and his left had hold of the hand of an exceeding fair woman who went beside him: behind him was a score of weaponed men in goodly attire, some bearing bows, some long spears, but each bearing a flowering bough in hand.

The tall man stopped in the midst of the space, and

the Alderman and they with him stirred not; though, as for Face-of-god, it was to him as if summer had come suddenly into the midst of winter, and for the very sweetness of delight his face grew pale.

Then the new-comer drew nigh to the Alderman and said:

"Hail to the Gate and the men of the Gate! Hail to the kindred of the children of the Gods!"

But the Alderman stood up and spake: "And hail to thee, tall man! Fair greeting to thee and thy company! Wilt thou name thyself with thine own name, or shall I call thee nought save Guest? Welcome art thou, by whatsoever name thou wilt be called. Here mayst thou and thy folk abide as long as ye will."

Said the new-comer: "Thanks have thou for thy greeting and for thy bidding! And that bidding shall we take, whatsoever may come of it; for we are minded to abide with thee for a while. But know thou, O Alderman of the Dalesmen, that I am not sackless toward thee and thine. My name is Folk-might of the Children of the Wolf, and this woman is the Sun-beam, my sister, and these behind me are of my kindred, and are well beloved and trusty. We are no evil men or wrong-doers; yet have we been driven into sore straits, wherein men must needs at whiles do deeds that make their friends few and their foes many. So it may be that I am thy foeman. Yet, if thou doubtest of me that I shall be a baneful guest, thou shalt have our weapons of us, and then mayest thou do thy will upon us without dread; and here first of all is my sword!"

Therewith he cast down the flowering branch he was bearing, and pulled his sword from out his sheath, and took it by the point, and held out the hilt to Iron-face.

But the Alderman smiled kindly on him and said:

"The blade is a good one, and I say it who know the craft of sword-forging; but I need it not, for thou seest I have a sword by my side. Keep your weapons, one and all; for ye have come amongst many and those no weaklings: and if so be that thy guilt against us is so great that we must needs fall on you, ye will need all your war-gear. But hereof is no need to speak till the time of the Folk-mote, which will be holden in three days' wearing; so let us forbear this matter till then; for I deem we shall have enough to say of other matters. Now, Folk-might, sit down beside me, and thou also, Sun-beam, fairest of women."

Therewith he looked into her face and reddened, and said:

"Yet belike thou hast a word of greeting for my son, Face-of-god, unless it be so that ye have not seen him before?"

Then Face-of-god came forward, and took Folk-might by the hand and kissed him; and he stood before the Sun-beam and took her hand, and the world waxed a wonder to him as he kissed her cheeks; and in no wise did she change countenance, save that her eyes softened, and she gazed at him full kindly from the happiness of her soul.

Then Face-of-god said: "Welcome, Guests, who erewhile guested me so well: now beginneth the day of your well-doing to the men of Burgdale; therefore will we do to you as well as we may."

Then Folk-might and the Sun-beam sat them down with the chieftains, one on either side of the Alderman, but Face-of-god passed forth to the others, and greeted them one by one: of them was Wood-father and his three sons, and Bow-may; and they rejoiced exceedingly to see him, and Bow-may said:

"Now it gladdens my heart to look upon thee

alive and thriving, and to remember that day last winter when I met thee on the snow, and turned thee back from the perilous path to thy pleasure, which the Dusky Men were besetting, of whom thou knewest nought. Yea, it was merry that tide; but this is better. Nay, friend," she said, "it availeth thee nought to strive to look out of the back of thine head: let it be enough to thee that she is there. Thou art now become a great chieftain, and she is no less; and this is a meeting of chieftains, and the folk are looking on and expecting demeanour of them as of the Gods; and she is not to be dealt with as if she were the daughter of some little goodman with whom one hath made tryst in the meadows. There! hearken to me for a while; at least till I tell thee that thou seemest to me to hold thine head higher than when last I saw thee; though that is no long time either. Hast thou been in battle again since that day?"

"Nay," he said, "I have stricken no stroke since I slew two felons within the same hour that we parted. And thou, sister, what hast thou done?"

She said: "The grey goose hath been on the wing thrice since that, bearing on it the bane of evil things."

Then said Wood-wise: "Kinswoman, tell him of that battle, since thou art deft with thy tongue."

She said: "Weary on battles! it is nought save this: twelve days agone needs must every fighting-man of the Wolf, carle or queen, wend away from Shadowy Vale, while those unmeet for battle we hid away in the caves at the nether end of the Dale: but Sun-beam would not endure that night, and fared with us, though she handled no weapon. All this we had to do because we had learned that a great company of the Dusky Men were over-nigh to our Dale, and needs must we fall upon them, lest they should learn too much, and spread the

story. Well, so wise was Folk-might that we came on them unawares by night and cloud at the edge of the Pine-wood, and but one of our men was slain, and of them not one escaped; and when the fight was over we counted four score and ten of their arm-rings."

He said: "Did that or aught else come of our meeting with them that morning?"

"Nay," she said, "nought came of it: those we slew were but a straying band. Nay, the four score and ten slain in the Pine-wood knew not of Shadowy Vale belike, and had no intent for it: they were but scouring the wood seeking their warriors that had gone out from Silverdale and came not aback."

"Thou art wise in war, Bow-may," said Face-of-god, and he smiled withal.

Bow-may reddened and said: "Friend Gold-mane, dost thou perchance deem that there is aught ill in my warring? And the Sun-beam, she naysayeth the bearing of weapons; though I deem that she hath little fear of them when they come her way."

Said Face-of-god: "Nay, I deem no ill of it, but much good. For I suppose that thou hast learned overmuch of the wont of the Dusky Men, and hast seen their thralls?"

She knitted her brows, and all the merriment went out of her face at that word, and she answered: "Yea, thou hast it; for I have both seen their thralls and been in the Dale of thralldom; and how then can I do less than I do? But for thee, I perceive that thou hast been nigh unto our foes and hast fallen in with their thralls; and that is well; for whatso tales we had told thee thereof it is like thou wouldst not have trowed in, as now thou must do, since thou thyself hast seen these poor folk. But now I will tell thee, Gold-mane, that my soul is sick of these comings and goings for the slaughter of a few wretches; and I long

for the Great Day of Battle, when it will be seen whether we shall live or die; and though I laugh and jest, yet doth the wearing of the days wear me."

He looked kindly on her and said: "I am War-leader of this Folk, and trust me that the waiting-tide shall not be long; wherefore now, sister, be merry to-day, for that is but meet and right; and cast aside thy care, for presently shalt thou behold many new friends. But now meseemeth overlong have ye been standing before our Gate, and it is time that ye should see the inside of our Burg and the inside of our House."

Indeed by this time so many men had come out of the street that the place before the Gate was all thronged, and from where he stood Face-of-god could scarce see his father, or Folk-might and the Sun-beam and the chieftains.

So he took Wood-father by the hand, and close behind him came Wood-wise and Bow-may, and he cried out for way that he might speak with the Alderman, and men gave way to them, and he led those new-comers close up to the gate-seats of the Elders, and as he clove the press, smiling and bright-eyed and happy, all gazed on him; but the Sun-beam, who was sitting between Iron-face and the Westland Chapman, and who heretofore had been agaze with eyes beholding little, past whose ears the words went unheard, and whose mind wandered into thoughts of things unfashioned yet, when she beheld him close to her again, then, taken unawares, her eyes caressed him, and she turned as red as a rose, as she felt all the sweetness of desire go forth from her to meet him. So that, he perceiving it, his voice was the clearer and sweeter for the inward joy he felt, as he said:

"Alderman, meseemeth it is now time that we bring our Guests into the House of our Fathers; for since they are in warlike array, and we are no longer

living in peace, and I am now War-leader of the Dale, I deem it but meet that I should have the guesting of them. Moreover, when we are come into our House, I will bid thee look into thy treasury, that thou mayst find therein somewhat which it may pleasure us to give to our Guests."

Said Iron-face: "Thou sayest well, son, and since the day is now worn past noon, and these folk are but just come from the Waste, therefore such as we have of meat and drink abideth them. And surely there is within our house a coffer which belongeth to thee and me; and forsooth I know not why we keep the treasures hoarded therein, save that it be for this cause: that if we were to give to our friends that which we ourselves use and love, which would be of all things pleasant to us, if we gave them such goods, they would be worn and worsened by our use of them. For this reason, therefore, do we keep fair things which we use not, so that we may give them to our friends.

"Now, Guests, both of the Waste and the Westland, since here is no Gate-thing or meeting of the Dale-wardens, and we sit here but for our pleasure, let us go take our pleasure within doors for a while, if it seem good to you."

Therewith he arose, and the folk made way for him and his Guests; and Folk-might went on the right hand of Iron-face, and beside him went the Chapman, who looked on him with a half-smile, as though he knew somewhat of him. But on the other side of Iron-face went the Sun-beam, whose hand he held, and after these came Face-of-god, leading in the rest of the New-comers, who yet held the flowery branches in their hands.

Now so much had Face-of-god told the Dalesmen, that they deemed they all knew these men for their battle-fellows of whom they had heard tell; and this

the more as the men were so goodly and manly of aspect, especially Folk-might, so that they seemed as if they were nigh akin to the Gods. As for the Sun-beam, they knew not how to praise her beauty enough, but they said that they had never known before how fair the Gods might be. So they raised a great shout of welcome as the men came through the Gate into the Burg, and all men turned their backs on the booths, so eager were they to behold closely these new friends.

But as the Guests went from the Gate to the House of the Face, going very slowly because of the press, there in the front of the throng stood the Bride with the women of the Runaways, whom she had caused to be clad very fairly; and she was fain to do them a pleasure by bringing them to sight of these new-comers, of whom she had not heard who they were, though she had heard the cry that strangers were at hand. So there she stood smiling a little with the pleasure of showing a fair sight to the poor people, as folk do with children. But when she saw those twain going on each side of the Alderman she knew them at once; and when the Sun-beam, who was on his left side, passed so close to her that she could see the very smoothness and dainty fashion of her skin, then was she astonied, and the world seemed strange to her, and till they were gone by, and for a while afterwards, she knew not where she was nor what she did, though it seemed to her as if she still saw the face of that fair woman as in a picture.

But the Sun-beam had noted her at first, even amongst the fair women of Burgstead, and she so steady and bright beside the wandering timorous eyes and lowering faces of the thralls. But suddenly, as eye met eye, she saw her face change; she saw her cheek whiten, her eyes stare, and her lips quiver, and she

knew at once who it was; for she had not seen her before as Folk-might had. Then the Sun-beam cast her eyes adown, lest her compassion might show in her face, and be a fresh grief to her that had lost the wedding and the love; and so she passed on.

As for Folk-might, he had seen her at once amongst all that folk as he came into the street, and in sooth he was looking for her; and when he saw her face change, as the sight of the Sun-beam smote upon her heart, his own face burned with shame and anger, and he looked back at her as he went toward the House. But she saw him not, nor noted him; and none deemed it strange that he looked long on the Bride, the treasure of Burgstead. But for some while Folk-might was few-spoken and sharp-spoken amongst the chieftains; for he was slow to master his longing and his wrath.

So when all the Guests had entered the door of the House of the Face, the Alderman turned back, and, standing on the threshold of his House, spake unto the throng:

"Men of the Dale, and ye Outlanders who may be here, know that this is a happy day; for hither have come to us Guests, men of the kindred of the Gods, and they are even those of whom Face-of-god my son hath told you. And they are friends of our friends and foes of our foes. These men are now in my House, as is but right; but when they come forth I look to you to cherish them in the best way ye know, and make much of them, as of those who may help us and who may by us be holpen."

Therewith he went in again and into the Hall, and bade show the New-comers to the dais; and wine of the best, and meat such as was to hand, was set before them. He bade men also get ready high feast as great as might be against the evening; and they did his bidding straightway.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE ALDERMAN GIVES GIFTS TO THEM OF SHADOWY VALE

In the Hall of the Face Folk-might sat on the dais at the right hand of the Alderman, and the Sun-beam on his left hand. But Iron-face also had beheld the Bride how her face changed, and he knew the cause, and was grieved and angry and ashamed thereof: also he bethought him how this stranger was sitting in the very place where the Bride used to sit, and of all the love, as of a very daughter, that he had had for her; howbeit he constrained himself to talk courteously and kindly both to Folk-might and the Sun-beam, as behoved the Chief of the House and the Alderman of the Dale. Moreover, he was not a little moved by the goodliness and wisdom of the Sun-beam and the manliness of Folk-might, who was the most chieftain-like of men.

But while they sat there Face-of-god went from man to man of the Guests, and made much of each, but especially of Wood-father and his sons and Bow-may, and they loved him, and praised him, and deemed him the best of hall-mates. Nor might the Sun-beam altogether refrain her from looking lovingly on him, and it could be seen of her that she deemed he was doing well, and like a wise leader and chieftain.

So wore away a while, and men were fulfilled of meat and drink; so then the Alderman arose and spake, and said:

"Is it not so, Guests, that ye would now gladly behold our market, and the goodly wares which the chapmen have brought us from the Cities?"

Then most men cried out "Yea, yea!" and Iron-face said: "Then shall ye go, nor be holden by me from your pleasure. And ye kinsmen who are the most guest-fain and the wisest, go ye with our friends, and make all things easy and happy for them. But first of all, Guests, I were well pleased if ye would take some small matters out of our abundance; for it were well that ye see them ere ye stand before the chapmen's booths, lest ye chaffer with them for what ye have already."

They all praised his bounty and thanked him for his goodwill: so he arose to go to his treasury, and bade certain of his folk go along with him to bear in the gifts. But ere he had taken three steps down the hall, Face-of-god prevented him and said:

"Kinsman, if thou hast anywhere a hauberk somewhat better than folk are wont to bear, such as thine own hand fashioneth, and a sword of the like stuff, I would have thee give them, the sword to my brother-in-arms Wood-wise here, and the war-coat to my sister Bow-may, who shooteth so well in the bow that none may shoot closer, and very few as close; and her shaft it was that delivered me when my skull was amongst the axes of the Dusky Men: else had I not been here."

Thereat Bow-may reddened and looked down, like a scholar who hath been over-praised for his learning and diligence; but the Alderman smiled on her and said:

"I thank thee, son, that thou hast let me know what these our two friends may be fain of: and as for this damsel-at-arms, it is a little thing that thou askest for her, and we might have found her something more worthy of her goodliness; yet forsooth, since we are all bound for the place where shafts and staves shall be good cheap, a greater treasure might be of less avail to her."

Thereat men laughed, and the Alderman went down the Hall with those bearers of gifts, and was away for a space while they drank and made merry: but presently back they came from the treasury bearing loads of goodly things which were laid on one of the endlong boards. Then began the gift-giving: and first he gave unto Folk-might six golden cups marvellously fashioned, the work of four generations of wrights in the Dale, and he himself had wrought the last two thereof. To Sun-beam he gave a girdle of gold, fashioned with great mastery, whereon were images of the Gods and the Fathers, and warriors, and beasts of the field and fowls of the air; and as he girt it about her loins, he said in a soft voice so that few heard:

"Sun-beam, thou fair woman, time has been when thou wert to us as the edge of the poisonous sword or the midnight torch of the murderer; but now I know not how it will be, or if the grief which thou hast given me will ever wear out or not. And now that I have beheld thee, I have little to do to blame my son; for indeed when I look on thee I cannot deem that there is any evil in thee. Yea, however it may be, take thou this gift as the reward of thine exceeding beauty."

She looked on him with kind eyes, and said meekly:

"Indeed, if I have hurt thee unwittingly, I grieve to have hurt so good a man. Hereafter belike we may talk more of this, but now I will but say, that whereas at first I needed but to win thy son's goodwill, so that our Folk might come to life and thriving again, now it is come to this, that he holdeth my heart in his hand and may do what he will with it; therefore I pray thee withhold not thy love either from him or from me."

He looked on her wondering, and said: "Thou art

such an one as might make the old man young, and the boy grow into manhood suddenly; and thy voice is as sweet as the voice of the song-birds singing in the dawn of early summer soundeth to him who hath been sick unto death, but who hath escaped it and is mending. And yet I fear thee."

Therewith he kissed her hand and turned unto the others, and he gave unto Bow-may a hauberk of ring-mail of his own fashioning, a sure defence and a wonderful work, and the collar thereof was done with gold and gems.

But he said to her: "Fair damsel-at-arms, faithful is thy face, and the fashion of thee is goodly: now art thou become one of the best of our friends, and this is little enough to give thee; yet would we fain ward thy body against the foeman; so grieve us not by gainsaying us."

And Bow-may was exceeding glad, and scarce knew how to cease handling that marvel of ring-mail.

Then to Woodwise Iron-face gave a most goodly sword, the blade all marked with dark lines like the stream of an eddying river, the hilts of steel and gold marvellously wrought; and all the work of a smith who had dwelt in the house of his father's father, and was a great warrior.

Unto Wood-father he gave a very goodly helm parcel-gilded; and to his sons and the other folk fair gifts of weapons and jewels and girdles and cups and other good things; so that their hearts were full of joy, and they all praised his open hand.

Then some of the best and merriest of the kinsmen of the Face, and Face-of-god with them, brought the Guests out into the street and among the booths. There Face-of-god beheld the Bride again; and she was standing by the booth of a chapman and dealing with him for a piece of goodly silken cloth to be a

gown for one of her guests, and she was talking and smiling as she chaffered with him, as her wont was; for she was ever very friendly of demeanour with all men. But he noted that she was yet exceeding pale, and he was right sorry thereof, for he loved her friendly; yet now had he no shame for all that had befallen, when he bethought him of the Sun-beam and the love she had for him. And also he had a deeming that the Bride would better of her grief.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE CHIEFTAINS TAKE COUNSEL IN THE HALL OF THE FACE

THEN turned Face-of-god back into the Hall, and saw where Iron-face sat at the dais, and with him Folk-might and Stone-face and the Elder of the Dale-wardens, and Sun-beam withal; so he went soberly up to the board, and sat himself down thereat beside Stone-face, over against Folk-might and his father, beside whom sat the Sun-beam; and Folk-might looked on him gravely, as a man powerful and trust-worthy, yet was his look somewhat sour.

Then the Alderman said: "My son, I said not to thee come back presently, because I wotted that thou wouldst surely do so, knowing that we have much to speak of. For, whatever these thy friends may have done, or whatsoever thou hast done with them to grieve us, all that must be set aside at this present time, since the matter in hand is to save the Dale and its folk. What sayest thou hereon? Since, young as thou mayst be, thou art our War-leader, and doubtless shalt so be after the Folk-mote hath been holden."

Face-of-god answered not hastily: indeed, as he

sat thinking for a minute or two, the fair spring day seemed to darken about them or to glare into the light of flames amidst the night-tide; and the joyous clamour without doors seemed to grow hoarse and fearful as the sound of wailing and shrieking. But he spake firmly and simply in a clear voice, and said:

"There can be no two words concerning what we have to aim at; these Dusky Men we must slay everyone, though we be fewer than they be."

Folk-might smiled and nodded his head; but the others sat staring down the hall or into the hangings.

Then spake Folk-might: "Thou wert a boy methought when I cast my spear at thee last autumn, Face-of-god, but now hast thou grown into a man. Now tell me, what deemest thou we must do to slay them all?"

Said Face-of-god: "Once again it is clear that we must fall upon them at home in Rosedale and Silverdale."

Again Folk-might nodded: but Iron-face said:

"Needeth this? May we not ward the Dale and send many bands into the wood to fall upon them when we meet them? Yea, and so doing these our guests have already slain many, as this valiant man hath told e'en now. Will ye not slay so many at last, that they shall learn to fear us, and abide at home and leave us at peace?"

But Face-of-god said: "Meseemeth, father, that this is not thy rede, and that thou sayest this but to try me: and perchance ye have been talking about me when I was without in the street e'en now. Even if it might be that we should thus cow these felons into abiding at home and tormenting their own thralls at their ease, yet how then are our friends of the Wolf holpen to their own again? And I shall tell thee that I have promised to this man and this woman

that I will give them no less than a man's help in this matter. Moreover, I have spoken in every house of the Dale, and to the Shepherds and the Woodlanders, and there is no man amongst them but will follow me in the quarrel. Furthermore, they have heard of the thralldom that is done on men no great way from their own houses; yea, they have seen it; and they remember the old saw, 'Grief in thy neighbour's hall is grief in thy garth,' and sure it is, father, that whether thou or I gainsay them, go they will to deliver the thralls of the Dusky Men, and will leave us alone in the Dale."

"This is no less than sooth," said the Dale-warden; "never have men gone forth more joyously to a merry-making than all men of us shall wend to this war."

"But," said Face-of-god, "of one thing ye may be sure, that these men will not abide our pleasure till we cut them all off in scattered bands, nor will they sit deedless at home. Nor indeed may they; for we have heard from their thralls that they look to have fresh tribes of them come to hand to eat their meat and waste their servants, and these and they must find new abodes and new thralls; and they are now warned by the overthrows and slayings that they have had at our hands that we are astir, and they will not delay long, but will fall upon us with all their host; it might even be to-day or to-morrow."

Said Folk-might: "In all this thou sayest sooth, brother of the Dale; and to cut this matter short, I will tell you all, that yesterday we had with us a runaway from Silverdale (it is overlong to tell how we fell in with her; for it was a woman). But she told us that this very moon is a new tribe come into the Dale, six long hundreds in number, and twice as many more are looked for in two eights of days, and

that ere this moon hath waned, that is, in twenty-four days, they will wend their ways straight for Burgdale, for they know the ways thereto. So I say that Face-of-god is right in all wise. But tell me, brother, hast thou thought of how we shall come upon these men ? "

" How many men wilt thou lead into battle ? " said Face-of-god.

Folk-might reddened, and said : " A few, a few ; maybe two hundreds all told."

" Yea," said Face-of-god, " but some special gain wilt thou be to us."

" So I deem at least," said Folk-might.

Said Face-of-god : " Good is that. Now have we held our Weapon-show in the Dale, and we find that we together with you be sixteen long hundreds of men ; and the tale of the foemen that be now in Silverdale, new-comers and all, shall be three thousands or thereabout, and in Rosedale hard on a thousand."

" Scarce so many," said Folk-might ; " some of the Felons have died ; we told over our silver arm-rings yesterday, and the tale was three hundred and eighty and six. Besides, they were never so many as thou deemest."

" Well," said Face-of-god, " yet at least they shall outnumber us sorely. We may scarce leave the Dale unguarded when our host is gone ; therefore I deem that we shall have but one thousand of men for our onslaught on Silverdale."

" How come ye to that ? " said Stone-face.

Said Face-of-god: "Abide a while, fosterer! Though the odds between us be great, it is not to be hidden that I wot how ye of the Wolf know of privy passes into Silverdale ; yea, into the heart thereof ; and this is the special gain ye have to give us. Therefore we, the thousand men, falling on the foe unawares, shall make

a great slaughter of them; and if the murder be but grim enough, those thralls of theirs shall fear us and not them, as already they hate them and not us, so that we may look to them for rooting out these sorry weeds after the overthrow. And what with one thing, what with another, we may cherish a good hope of clearing Silverdale at one stroke with the said thousand men.

"There remaineth Rosedale, which will be easier to deal with, because the Dusky Men therein are fewer and the thralls as many: that also would I fall on at the same time as we fall on Silverdale with the men that are left over from the Silverdale onslaught. Wherefore my rede is, that we gather all those unmeet for battle in the field into this Burg, with ten tens of men to strengthen them; which shall be enough for them, along with the old men, and lads, and sturdy women, to defend themselves till help comes, if aught of evil befall, or to flee into the mountains, or at the worst to die valiantly. Then let the other five hundreds fare up to Rosedale, and fall on the Dusky Men therein about the same time, but not before our onslaught on Silverdale: thus shall hand help foot, so that stumbling be not falling; and we may well hope that our rede shall thrive."

Then was he silent, and the Sun-beam looked upon him with gleaming eyes and parted lips, waiting eagerly to hear what Folk-might would say. He held his peace a while, drumming on the board with his fingers, and none else spake a word. At last he said:

"War-leader of Burgdale, all that thou hast spoken likes me well, and even so must it be done, saving that parting of our host and sending one part to fall upon Rosedale. I say, nay; let us put all our might into that one stroke on Silverdale, and then we are undone indeed if we fail; but so shall we be if we fail anywise;

but if we win Silverdale, then shall Rosedale lie open before us."

"My brother," said Face-of-god, "thou art a tried warrior, and I but a lad: but dost thou not see this, that whatever we do, we shall not at one onslaught slay all the Dusky Men of Silverdale, and those that flee before us shall betake them to Rosedale, and tell all the tale, and what shall hinder them then from falling on Burgdale (since they are no great way from it) after they have murdered what they will of the unhappy people under their hands?"

Said Folk-might: "I say not but that there is a risk thereof, but in war we must needs run such risks, and all should be risked rather than that our blow on Silverdale be light. For we be the fewer; and if the foemen have time to call that to mind, then are we all lost."

Said Stone-face: "Meseemeth, War-leader, that there is nought so much to dread in leaving Rosedale to itself for a while; for not only may we follow hard on the fleers if they flee to Rosedale, and be there no long time after them, before they have time to stir their host; but also after the overthrow we shall be free to send men back to Burgdale by way of Shadowy Vale. I deem that herein Folk-might hath the right of it."

"Even so say I," said the Alderman; "besides, we might then leave more folk behind us for the warding of the Dale. So, son, the risk whereof thou speakest groweth the lesser the longer it is looked on."

Then spake the Dale-warden: "Yet saving your wisdom, Alderman, the risk is there yet. For if these felons come into the Dale at all, even if the folk left behind hold the Burg and keep themselves unmurdered, yet may they not hinder the foe from spoiling our homesteads; so that our folk coming

back in triumph shall find ruin at home, and spend weary days in hunting their foemen, who shall, many of them, escape into the Wild-wood."

"Yea," said the Sun-beam, "sooth is that; and Face-of-god is wise to think of it and of other matters. Yet one thing we must bear in mind, that all may not go smoothly in our day's work in Silverdale; so we must have force there to fall back on, in case we miss our stroke at first. Therefore, I say, send we no man to Rosedale, and leave we no able man-at-arms behind in the Burg, so that we have with us every blade that may be gathered."

Iron-face smiled and said: "Thou art wise, damsel; and I marvel that so fair-fashioned a thing as thou can think so hardly of the meeting of the fallow blades. But hearken! will not the Dusky Men hear that we have stripped the Dale of fighting-men, and may they not then give our host the go-by and send folk to ruin us?"

There was silence while Face-of-god looked down on the board; but presently he lifted up his face and said:

"Folk-might was right when he said that all must be risked. Let us leave Rosedale till we have overcome them of Silverdale. Moreover, my father, thou must not deem of these felons as if they were of like wits to us, to forecast the deeds to come, and weigh the chances nicely, and unravel tangled clews. Rather they move like to the stares in autumn, or the winter wild-geese, and will all be thrust forward by some sting that entereth into their imaginations. Therefore, if they have appointed one moon to wear before they fall upon us, they will not stir till then, and we have time enough to do what must be done. Wherefore am I now of one mind with the rest of you. Now meseemeth it were well that these things which we have spoken here, and shall speak, should not be

noised abroad openly ; nay, at the Folk-mote it would be well that nought be said about the day or the way of our onslaught on Silverdale, lest the foe take warning and be on their guard. Though, sooth to say, did I deem that if they had word of our intent they of Rosedale would join themselves to them of Silverdale, and that we should thus have all our foes in one net, then were I fain if the word would reach them. For my soul loathes the hunting that shall befall up and down the wood for the slaying of a man here, and two or three there, and the wearing of the days in wandering up and down with weapons in the hand, and the spinning out of hatred and delaying of peace."

Then Iron-face reached his hand across the board and took his son's hand, and said :

"Hail to thee, son, for thy word ! Herein thou speakest as if from my very soul, and fain am I of such a War-leader."

And desire drew the eyes of the Sun-beam to Face-of-god, and she beheld him proudly. But he said :

"All hath been spoken that the others of us may speak ; and now it falleth to the part of Folk-might to order our goings for the tryst for the onslaught, and the trysting-place shall be in Shadowy Vale. How sayest thou, Chief of the Wolf ?"

Said Folk-might : "I have little to say ; and it is for the War-leader to see to this closely and piecemeal. I deem, as we all deem, that there should be no delay ; yet were it best to wend not all together to Shadowy Vale, but in divers bands, as soon as ye may after the Folk-mote, by the sure and nigh ways that we shall show you. And when we are gathered there, short is the rede, for all is ready there to wend by the passes which we know throughly, and whereby it is but two days' journey to the head of Silverdale, nigh to the caves of the silver, where the Felons dwell the thickest."

He set his teeth, and his colour came and went: for as constantly as the onslaught had been in his mind, yet whenever he spake of the great day of battle, hope and joy and anger wrought a tumult in his soul; and now that it was so nigh withal, he could not refrain his joy.

But he spake again: "Now therefore, War-leader, it is for thee to order the goings of thy folk. But I will tell thee that they shall not need to take aught with them save their weapons and victual for the way, that is, for thirty hours; because all is ready for them in Shadowy Vale, though it be but a poor place as to victual. Canst thou tell us, therefore, what thou wilt do?"

Face-of-god had knit his brows and become gloomy of countenance; but now his face cleared, and he set his hand to his pouch, and drew forth a written parchment, and said:

"This is the order whereof I have bethought me. Before the Folk-mote I and the Wardens shall speak to the leaders of hundreds, who be mostly here at the Fair, and give them the day and the hour whereon they shall, each hundred, take their weapons and wend to Shadowy Vale, and also the place where they shall meet the men of yours who shall lead them across the Waste. These hundred-leaders shall then go straightway and give the word to the captains of scores, and the captains of scores to the captains of tens; and if, as is scarce doubtful, the Folk-mote yea-says the onslaught and the fellowship with you of the Wolf, then shall those leaders of tens bring their men to the trysting-place, and so go their ways to Shadowy Vale. Now here I have the roll of our Weapon-show, and I will look to it that none shall be passed over; and if ye ask me in what order they had best get on the way, my rede is that a two hundred

should depart on the very evening of the day of the Folk-mote, and these to be of our folk of the Upper Dale; and on the morning of the morrow of the Folk-mote another two hundreds from the Dale; and in the evening of the same day the folk of the Shepherds, three hundreds or more, and that will be easy to them; again on the next day two more bands of the Lower Dale, one in the morning, one in the evening. Lastly, in the earliest dawn of the third day from the Folk-mote shall the Woodlanders wend their ways. But one hundred of men let us leave behind for the warding of the Burg, even as we agreed before. As for the place of tryst for the faring over the Waste, let it be the end of the knolls just by the jaws of the pass yonder, where the Weltering Water comes into the Dale from the East. How say ye?"

They all said, and Folk-might especially, that it was right well devised, and that thus it should be done.

Then turned Face-of-god to the Dale-warden, and said:

"It were good, brother, that we saw the other wardens as soon as may be, to do them to wit of this order, and what they have to do."

Therewith he arose and took the Elder of the Dale-wardens away with him, and the twain set about their business straightway. Neither did the others abide long in the Hall, but went out into the Burg to see the chapmen and their wares. There the Alderman bought what he needed of iron and steel and other matters; and Folk-might cheapened him a dagger curiously wrought, and a web of gold and silk for the Sun-beam, for which wares he paid in silver arm-rings, new-wrought and of strange fashion.

But amidst of the chaffer was now a great ring of men; and in the midst of the ring stood Redesman, fiddle and bow in hand, and with him were four

damsels wondrously arrayed; for the first was clad in a smock so craftily wrought with threads of green and many colours, that it seemed like a piece of the green field beset with primroses and cowslips and harebells and windflowers, rather than a garment woven and sewn; and in her hand she bore a naked sword, with golden hilts and gleaming blade. But the second bore on her roses done in like manner, both blossoms and green leaves, wherewith her body was covered decently, which else had been naked. The third was clad as though she were wading the wheat-field to the waist, and above was wrapped in the leaves and bunches of the wine-tree. And the fourth was clad in a scarlet gown flecked with white wool to set forth the winter's snow, and broidered over with the burning brands of the Holy Hearth; and she bore on her head a garland of mistletoe. And these four damsels were clearly seen to image the four seasons of the year—Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. But amidst them stood a fountain or conduit of gilded work cunningly wrought, and full of the best wine of the Dale, and gilded cups and beakers hung about it.

So now Redesman fell to caressing his fiddle with the bow till it began to make sweet music, and therewith the hearts of all danced with it; and presently words came into his mouth, and he fell to singing; and the damsels answered him:

Earth-wielders, that fashion the Dale-dwellers' treasure,
  Soft are ye by seeming, yet hardy of heart!
No warrior amongst us withstandeth your pleasure;
  No man from his meadow may thrust you apart.

Fresh and fair are your bodies, but far beyond telling
  Are the years of your lives, and the craft ye have stored.
Come give us a word, then, concerning our dwelling,
  And the days to befall us, the fruit of the sword.

WINTER SAITH:

When last in the feast-hall the Yule-fire flickered,
  The foot of no foeman fared over the snow,
And nought but the wind with the ash-branches bickered:
  Next Yule ye may deem it a long time ago.

AUTUMN SAITH:

Loud laughed ye last year in the wheat-field a-smiting;
  And ye laughed as your backs drave the beam of the press.
When the edge of the war-sword the acres are lighting
  Look up to the Banner and laugh ye no less.

SUMMER SAITH:

Ye called and I came, and how good was the greeting,
  When ye wrapped me in roses both bosom and side!
Here yet shall I long, and be fain of our meeting,
  As hidden from battle your coming I bide.

SPRING SAITH:

I am here for your comfort, and lo! what I carry;
  The blade with the bright edges bared to the sun.
To the field, to the work then, that e'en I may tarry
  For the end of the tale in my first days begun!

Therewith the throng opened, and a young man stepped lightly into the ring, clad in very fair armour, with a gilded helm on his head; and he took the sword from the hand of the Maiden of Spring, and waved it in the air till the westering sun flashed back from it. Then each of the four damsels went up to the swain and kissed his mouth; and Redesman drew the bow across the strings, and the four damsels sang together, standing round about the young warrior:

It was but a while since for earth's sake we trembled,
  Lest the increase our life-days had won for the Dale,
All the wealth that the moons and the years had assembled,
  Should be but a mock for the days of your bale.

But now we behold the sun smite on the token
  In the hand of the Champion, the heart of a man;
We look down the long years and see them unbroken;
  Forth fareth the Folk by the ways it began.

So bid ye these chapmen in autumn returning,
  To bring iron for ploughshares and steel for the scythe,
And the over-sea oil that hath felt the sun's burning,
  And fair webs for your women soft-spoken and blithe;

And pledge ye your word in the market to meet them,
  As many a man and as many a maid,
As eager as ever, as guest-fain to greet them,
  And bide till the booth from the waggon is made.

Come, guests of our lovers! for we, the year-wielders,
  Bid each man and all to come hither and take
A cup from our hands midst the peace of our shielders,
  And drink to the days of the Dale that we make.

Then went the damsels to that wine-fountain, and drew thence cups of the best and brightest wine of the Dale, and went round about the ring, and gave drink to whomsoever would, both of the chapmen and the others; while the weaponed youth stood in the midst bearing aloft his sword and shield like an image in a holy place, and Redesman's bow still went up and down the strings, and drew forth a sweet and merry tune.

Great game it was now to see the stark Burgdale carles dragging the Men of the Plain, little loth, up to the front of the ring, that they might stretch out their hands for a cup, and how many a one, as he took it, took as much as he might of the damsel's hand withal.

As for the damsels, they played the Holy Play very daintily, neither reddening nor laughing, but faring so solemnly, and withal so sweetly and bright-faced, that it might well have been deemed that they were in very sooth Maidens of the God of Earth sent from the ever-enduring Hall to cheer the hearts of men.

So simply and blithely did the Men of Burgdale disport them after the manner of their fathers, trusting in their valour and beholding the good days to be.

So wore the evening, and when night was come, men feasted throughout the Burg from house to house, and every hall was full. But the Guests from Shadowy Vale feasted in the Hall of the Face in all glee and goodwill; and with them were the chief of the chapmen and two others; but the rest of them had been laid hold of by goodmen of the Burg, and dragged into their feast-halls, for they were fain of those guests and their tales. One of the chapmen in the House of the Face knew Folk-might, and hailed him by the name he had borne in the Cities, Regulus to wit; indeed, the chief chapman knew him, and even somewhat over-well, for he had been held to ransom by Folk-might in those past days, and even yet feared him, because he, the chapman, had played somewhat of a dastard's part to him. But the other was an open-hearted and merry fellow, and no weakling; and Folk-might was fain of his talk concerning times bygone, and the fields they had foughten in, and other adventures that had befallen them, both good and evil.

As for Face-of-god, he went about the Hall soberly, and spake no more than behoved him, so as not to seem a mar-feast; for the image of the slaughter to be yet abode with him, and his heart foreboded the after-grief of the battle. He had no speech with the Sun-beam till men were sundering after the feast; and

then he came close to her amidst of the turmoil, and said:

"Time presses on me these days; but if thou wouldest speak with me to-morrow as I would with thee, then mightest thou go on the Bridge of the Burg about sunrise, and I will be there, and we two only."

Her face, which had been somewhat sad that evening (for she had been watching his), brightened at that word, and she took his hand as folk came thronging round about them, and said: "Yea, friend, I shall be there, and fain of thee." And therewithal they sundered for that night.

And all men went to sleep throughout the Burg: howbeit they set a watch at the Burg-Gate; and Hall-face, when he was coming back from the woodland ward about sunset, fell in with Red-coat of Waterless and four score men on the Portway coming to meet him and take his place. All which was clean contrary to the wont of the Burgdalers, who at most whiles held no watch and ward, not even in Fair-time.

CHAPTER XXXV

FACE-OF-GOD TALKETH WITH THE SUN-BEAM

Face-of-God was at the Bridge on the morrow before sun-rising, and as he turned about at the Bridge-foot he saw the Sun-beam coming down the street; and his heart rose to his mouth at the sight of her, and he went to meet her and took her by the hand; and there were no words between them till they had kissed and caressed each other, for there was no one stirring about them. So they went over the Bridge into the meadows, and eastward of the beaten path thereover.

The grass was growing thick and strong, and it was

full of flowers, as the cowslip and the oxlip, and the chequered daffodil, and the wild tulip : the black-thorn was well-nigh done blooming, but the hawthorn was in bud, and in some places growing white. It was a fair morning, warm and cloudless, but the night had been misty, and the haze still hung about the meadows of the Dale where they were wettest, and the grass and its flowers were heavy with dew, so that the Sun-beam went barefoot in the meadow. She had a dark cloak cast over her kirtle, and had left her glittering gown behind her in the House.

They went along hand in hand exceeding fain of each other, and the sun rose as they went, and the long beams of gold shone through the tops of the tall trees across the grass they trod, and a light wind rose up in the north, as Face-of-god stayed a moment and turned toward the Face of the Sun and prayed to Him, while the Sun-beam's hand left the War-leader's hand and stole up to his golden locks and lay amongst them.

Presently they went on, and the feet of Face-of-god led him unwitting toward the chestnut-grove by the old dyke where he had met the Bride such a little while ago, till he bethought whither he was going and stopped short and reddened ; and the Sun-beam noted it, but spake not ; but he said : " Hereby is a fair place for us to sit and talk till the day's work beginneth."

So then he turned aside, and soon they came to a hawthorn brake out of which arose a great tall-stemmed oak, showing no green as yet save a little on its lower twigs ; and anigh it, yet with room for its boughs to grow freely, was a great bird-cherry tree, all covered now with sweet-smelling white blossoms. There they sat down on the trunk of a tree felled last year, and she cast off her cloak, and took his face between her two hands and kissed him long and fondly, and for a

while their joy had no word. But when speech came to them, it was she that spake first and said:

"Gold-mane, my dear, sorely I wonder at thee and at me, how we are changed since that day last autumn when I first saw thee. Whiles I think, didst thou not laugh when thou wert by thyself that day, and mock at me privily, that I must needs take such wisdom on myself, and lesson thee standing like a stripling before me. Dost thou not call it all to mind and make merry over it, now that thou art become a great chieftain and a wise warrior, and I am yet what I always was, a young maiden of the kindred; save that now I abide no longer for my love?"

Her face was exceeding bright and rippled with joyous smiles, and he looked at her and deemed that her heart was overflowing with happiness, and he wondered at her indeed that she was so glad of him, and he said:

"Yea, indeed, oft do I see that morning in the woodland hall and thee and me therein, as one looketh on a picture; yea verily, and I laugh, yet is it for very bliss; neither do I mock at all. Did I not deem thee a God then? and am I not most happy now when I can call it thus to mind? And as to thee, thou wert wise then, and yet art thou wise now. Yea, I thought thee a God; and if we are changed, is it not rather that thou hast lifted me up to thee, and not come down to me?"

Yet therewithal he knit his brows somewhat and said:

"Yet thou hast not to tell me that all thy love for thy Folk, and thy yearning hope for its recoverance, was but a painted show. Else why shouldst thou love me the better now that I am become a chieftain, and therefore am more meet to understand thy hope and thy sorrow? Did I not behold thee as we stood before the Wolf of the Hall of Shadowy Vale, how the

tears stood in thine eyes as thou beheldest him, and thine hand in mine quivered and clung to me, and thou wert all changed in a moment of time? Was all this then but a seeming and a beguilement?"

"O young man," she said, "hast thou not said it, that we stood there close together, and my hand in thine and desire growing up in me? Dost thou not know how this also quickeneth the story of our Folk, and our goodwill towards the living, and remembrance of the dead? Shall they have lived and desired, and we deny desire and life? Or tell me: what was it made thee so chieftain-like in the Hall yesterday, so that thou wert the master of all our wills, for as self-willed as some of us were? Was it not that I, whom thou deemest lovely, was thereby watching thee and rejoicing in thee? Did not the sweetness of thy love quicken thee? Yet because of that was thy warrior's wisdom and thy foresight an empty show? Heedest thou nought the Folk of the Dale? Wouldest thou sunder from the children of the Fathers, and dwell amongst strangers?"

He kissed her and smiled on her and said: "Did I not say of thee that thou wert wiser than the daughters of men? See how wise thou hast made me!"

She spake again: "Nay, nay, there was no feigning in my love for my people. How couldest thou think it, when the Fathers and the kindred have made this body that thou lovest, and the voice of their songs is in the speech thou deemest sweet?"

He said: "Sweet friend, I deemed not that there was feigning in thee: I was but wondering what I am and how I was fashioned, that I should make thee so glad that thou couldst for a while forget thy hope of the days before we met."

She said: "O how glad, how glad! Yet was I nought hapless. In despite of all trouble I had no

down-weighing grief, and I had the hope of my people before me. Good were my days; but I knew not till now how glad a child of man may be."

Their words were hushed for a while amidst their caresses. Then she said:

"Gold-mane, my friend, I mocked not my past self because I deem that I was a fool then, but because I see now that all that my wisdom could do, would have come about without my wisdom; and that thou, deeming thyself something less than wise, didst accomplish the thing I craved, and that which thou didst crave also; and withal wisdom embraced thee, along with love."

Therewith she cast her arms about him and said:

"O friend, I mock myself of this: that erst thou deemedst me a God and fearedst me, but now thou seemest to me to be a God, and I fear thee. Yea, though I have longed so sore to be with thee since the day of Shadowy Vale, and though I have wearied of the slow wearing of the days, and it hath tormented me; yet now that I am with thee, I bless the torment of my longing; for it is but my longing that compelleth me to cast away my fear of thee and caress thee, because I have learned how sweet it is to love thee thus."

He wound his arms about her, and sweeter was their longing than mere joy; and though their love was beyond measure, yet was therein no shame to aught, not even to the lovely Dale and that fair season of spring, so goodly they were among the children of men.

In a while they arose and turned homeward, and went over the open meadow, and it was yet early, and the dew was as heavy on the grass as before, though the wide sunlight was now upon it, glittering on the wet blades, and shining through the bells of the chequered daffodils till they looked like gouts of blood.

"Look," said Sun-beam, as they went along by the same way whereas they came, "deemest thou not that other speech-friends besides us have been abroad to talk together apart on this morning of the eve of battle? It is nought unwonted, that we do, even though we forget the trouble of the people to think of our own joy for a while."

The smile died out of her face as she spoke, and she said: "O friend, this much may I say for myself in all sooth, that indeed I would die for the kindred and its good days, nor falter therein; but if I am to die, might I but die in thine arms!"

He looked very lovingly on her, and put his arm about her and kissed her and said: "What ails us to stand in the doom-ring and bear witness against ourselves before the kindred? Now I will say, that whatsoever the kindred may or can call upon me to do, that will I do, nor grudge the deed: I am sackless before them. But that is true which I spake to thee when we came together up out of Shadowy Vale, to wit, that I am no strifeful man, but a peaceful; and I look to it to win through this war, and find on the other side either death, or life amongst a happy folk; and I deem that this is mostly the mind of our people."

She said: "Thou shalt not die, thou shalt not die!"

"Mayhappen not," he said; "yet yesterday I could not but look into the slaughter to come, and it seemed to me a grim thing, and darkened the day for me; and I grew acold as a man walking with the dead. But tell me: thou sayest I shall not die; dost thou say this only because I am become dear to thee, or dost thou speak it out of thy foresight of things to come?"

She stopped and looked silently a while over the meadows towards the houses of the Thorp: they were

standing now on the border of a shallow brook that ran down toward the Weltering Water; it had a little strand of fine sand like the sea-shore, driven close together, and all moist, because that brook was used to flood the meadow for the feeding of the grass; and the last evening the hatches which held up the water had been drawn, so that much had ebbed away and left the strand aforesaid.

After a while the Sun-beam turned to Face-of-god, and she was become somewhat pale; she said:

"Nay, I have striven to see, and can see nought save the picture of hope and fear that I make for myself. So it oft befalleth foreseeing women, that the love of a man cloudeth their vision. Be content, dear friend; it is for life or death; but whichso it be, the same for me and thee together?"

"Yea," he said, "and well content I am; so now let each of us trust in the other to be both good and dear, even as I trusted in thee the first hour that I looked on thee."

"It is well," she said; "it is well. How fair thou art; and how fair is the morn, and this our Dale in the goodly season; and all this abideth us when the battle is over."

Once more her voice became sweet and wheedling, and the smile lit up her face again, and she pointed down to the sand with her finger, and said:

"See thou! Here indeed have other lovers passed by across the brook. Shall we wish them good luck?"

He laughed and looked down on the sand, and said:

"Thou art in haste to make a story up. Indeed I see that these first footprints are of a woman, for no carle of the Dale has a foot as small; for we be tall fellows; and these others withal are a man's footprints; and if they showed that they had been walking side by side, simple had been thy tale; but so it is

not. I cannot say that these two pairs of feet went over the brook within five minutes of each other; but sure it is that they could not have been faring side by side. Well, belike they were lovers bickering, and we may wish them luck out of that. Truly it is well seen that Bow-may hath done thine hunting for thee, dear friend; or else wouldest thou have lacked venison; for thou hast no hunter's eye."

"Well," she said, "but wish them luck, and give me thine hand upon it."

He took her hand, and fondled it, and said: "By this hand of my speech-friend, I wish these twain all luck, in love and in leisure, in faring and fighting, in sowing and samming, in getting and giving. Is it well enough wished? If so it be, then come thy ways, dear friend; for the day's work is at hand."

"It is well wished," she said. "Now hearken: by the valiant hand of the War-leader, by the hand that shall unloose my girdle, I wish these twain to be as happy as we be."

He made as if to draw her away, but she hung aback to set the print of her foot beside the woman's foot, and then they went on together, and soon crossed the Bridge, and came home to the House of the Face.

When they had broken their fast, Face-of-god would straight get to his business of ordering matters for the warfare, and was wishful to speak with Folk-might; but found him not, either in the House or the street. But a man said:

"I saw the tall Guest come abroad from the House and go toward the Bridge very early in the morning."

The Sun-beam, who was anigh when that was spoken, heard it and smiled, and said: "Gold-mane, deemest thou that it was my brother whom we blessed?"

"I wot not," he said; "but I would he were here, for this gear must speedily be looked to."

Nevertheless it was nigh an hour before Folk-might came home to the House. He strode in lightly and gaily, and shaking the crest of his war-helm as he went. He looked friendly on Face-of-god, and said to him:

"Thou hast been seeking me, War-leader; but grudge it not that I have caused thee to tarry. For as things have gone, I am twice the man for thine helping that I was yester-eve; and thou art so ready and deft, that all will be done in due time."

He looked as if he would have had Face-of-god ask of him what made him so fain, but Face-of-god said only:

"I am glad of thy gladness; but now let us dally no longer, for I have many folk to see to-day and much to set a-going."

So therewith they spake together a while, and then went their ways together toward Carlstead and the Woodlanders.

CHAPTER XXXVI

FOLK-MIGHT SPEAKETH WITH THE BRIDE

It must be told that those footprints which Face-of-god and the Sun-beam had blessed bewixt jest and earnest had more to do with them than they wotted of. For Folk-might, who had had many thoughts and longings since he had seen the Bride again, rose up early about sunrise, and went out-a-doors, and wandered about the Burg, letting his eyes stray over the goodly stone houses and their trim gardens, yet noting them little, since the Bride was not there.

At last he came to where there was an open place, straight-sided, longer than it was wide, with a wall on each side of it, over which showed the blossomed

boughs of pear and cherry and plum-trees: on either hand before the wall was a row of great lindens, now showing their first tender green, especially on their lower twigs, where they were sheltered by the wall. At the nether end of this place Folk-might saw a grey stone house, and he went towards it betwixt the lindens, for it seemed right great, and presently was but a score of paces from its door, and as yet there was no man, carle or queen, stirring about it.

It was a long low house with a very steep roof; but belike the hall was built over some undercroft, for many steps went up to the door on either hand; and the doorway was low, with a straight lintel under its arch. This house, like the House of the Face, seemed ancient and somewhat strange, and Folk-might could not choose but take note of it. The front was all of good ashlar work, but it was carven all over, without heed being paid to the joints of the stones, into one picture of a flowery meadow, with tall trees and bushes in it, and fowl perched in the trees and running through the grass, and sheep and kine and oxen and horses feeding down the meadow; and over the door at the top of the stair was wrought a great steer bigger than all the other neat, whose head was turned toward the sun-rising and uplifted with open mouth, as though he were lowing aloud. Exceeding fair seemed that house to Folk-might, and as though it were the dwelling of some great kindred.

But he had scarce gone over it with his eyes, and was just about to draw nigher yet to it, when the door at the top of those steps opened, and a woman came out of the house clad in a green kirtle and a gown of brazil, with a golden-hilted sword girt to her side. Folk-might saw at once that it was the Bride, and drew aback behind one of the trees so that she might not see him, if she had not already seen him,

as it seemed not that she had; for she stayed but for a moment on the top of the stair, looking out down the tree-rows, and then came down the stair and went soberly along the road, passing so close to Folk-might that he could see the fashion of her beauty closely, as one looks into the work of some deftest artificer. Then it came suddenly into his head that he would follow her and see whither she was wending. "At least," said he to himself, "if I come not to speech with her, I shall be nigh unto her, and shall see somewhat of her beauty."

So he came out quietly from behind the tree, and followed her softly; and he was clad in no garment save his kirtle, and bare no weapons to clash and jingle, though he had his helm on his head for lack of a softer hat. He kept her well in sight, and she went straight onward and looked not back. She went by the way whereas he had come, till they were in the main street, wherein as yet was no one afoot; she made her way to the Bridge, and passed over it into the meadows; but when she had gone but a few steps, she stayed a little and looked on the ground, and as she did so turned a little toward Folk-might, who had drawn back into the last of the refuges over the upstream buttresses. He saw that there was a half-smile on her face, but he could not tell whether she were glad or sorry. A light wind was beginning to blow, that stirred her raiment and raised a lock of hair that had strayed from the golden fillet round about her head, and she looked most marvellous fair.

Now she looked along the grass that glittered under the beams of the newly-risen sun, and noted belike how heavy the dew lay on it; and the grass was high already, for the spring had been hot, and haysel would be early in the Dale. So she put off her shoes, that were of deerskin and broidered with golden threads,

and turned somewhat from the way, and hung them up amidst the new green leaves of a hawthorn bush that stood nearby, and so went thwart the meadow somewhat eastward straight from that bush, and her feet shone out like pearls amidst the deep green grass.

Folk-might followed presently, and she stayed not again, nor turned, nor beheld him ; he recked not if she had, for then would he have come up with her and hailed her, and he knew that she was no foolish maiden to start at the sight of a man who was the friend of her Folk.

So they went their ways till she came to the strand of the water-meadow brook aforesaid, and she went through the little ripples of the shallow without staying, and on through the tall deep grass of the meadow beyond, to where they met the brook again ; for it swept round the meadow in a wide curve, and turned back toward itself ; so it was some half furlong over from water to water.

She stood a while on the brink of the brook here, which was brim-full and nigh running into the grass, because there was a dam just below the place ; and Folk-might drew nigher to her under cover of the thorn-bushes, and looked at the place about her and beyond her. The meadow beyond stream was very fair and flowery, but not right great ; for it was bounded by a grove of ancient chestnut trees, that went on and on toward the southern cliffs of the Dale : in front of the chestnut wood stood a broken row of black-thorn bushes, now growing green and losing their blossom, and he could see betwixt them that there was a grassy bank running along, as if there had once been a turf-wall and ditch round about the chestnut trees.—For indeed this was the old place of tryst between Gold-mane and the Bride, whereof the tale hath told before.

The Bride stayed scarce longer than gave him time to note all this; but he deemed that she was weeping, though he could not rightly see her face; for her shoulders heaved, and she hung her face adown and put up her hands to it. But now she went a little higher up the stream, where the water was shallower, and waded the stream and went up over the meadow, still weeping, as he deemed, and went between the black-thorn bushes, and sat her down on the grassy bank with her back to the chestnut trees.

Folk-might was ashamed to have seen her weeping, and was half-minded to turn him back again at once; but love constrained him, and he said to himself, "Where shall I see her again privily, if I pass by this time and place?" So he waited a little till he deemed she might have mastered the passion of tears, and then came forth from his bush, and went down to the water and crossed it, and went quietly over the meadow straight towards her. But he was not half-way across, when she lifted up her face from between her hands and beheld the man coming. She neither started nor rose up; but straightened herself as she sat, and looked right into Folk-might's eyes as he drew near, though the tears were not dry on her cheeks.

Now he stood before her, and said: "Hail to the Daughter of a mighty House! Mayst thou live happy!"

She answered: "Hail to thee also, Guest of our Folk! Hast thou been wandering about our meadows, and happened on me perchance?"

"Nay," he said; "I saw thee come forth from the House of the Steer, and I followed thee hither."

She reddened a little, and knit her brow, and said:

"Thou wilt have something to say to me?"

"I have much to say to thee," he said; "yet it was

sweet to me to behold thee, even if I might not speak with thee."

She looked on him with her deep simple eyes, and neither reddened again, nor seemed wroth; then she said:

"Speak what thou hast in thine heart, and I will hearken without anger whatsoever it may be; even if thou hast but to tell me of the passing folly of a mighty man, which in a month or two he will not remember for sorrow or for joy. Sit here beside me, and tell me thy thought."

So he sat him adown and said: "Yea, I have much to say to thee, but it is hard to me to say it. But this I will say: to-day and yesterday make the third time I have seen thee. The first time thou wert happy and calm, and no shadow of trouble was on thee; the second time thine happy days were waning, though thou scarce knewest it; but to-day and yesterday thou art constrained by the bonds of grief, and wouldest loosen them if thou mightest."

She said: "What meanest thou? How knowest thou this? How may a stranger partake in my joy and my sorrow?"

He said: "As for yesterday, all the people might see thy grief and know it. But when I beheld thee the first time, I saw thee that thou wert more fair and lovely than all other women; and when I was away from thee, the thought of thee and thine image were with me, and I might not put them away; and oft at such and such a time I wondered and said to myself, what is she doing now? though god wot I was dealing with tangles and troubles and rough deeds enough. But the second time I beheld thee, when I had looked to have great joy in the sight of thee, my heart was smitten with a pang of grief; for I saw thee hanging on the words and the looks of another man, who was

light-minded toward thee, and that thou wert troubled with the anguish of doubt and fear. And he knew it not, nor saw it, though I saw it."

Her face grew troubled, and the tearful passion stirred within her. But she held it aback, and said, as anyone might have said it:

"How wert thou in the Dale, mighty man? We saw thee not."

He said: "I came hither hidden in other semblance than mine own. But meddle not therewith; it availeth nought. Let me say this, and do thou hearken to it. I saw thee yesterday in the street, and thou wert as the ghost of thine old gladness; although belike thou hast striven with sorrow; for I see thee with a sword by thy side, and we have been told that thou, O fairest of women, hast given thyself to the Warrior to be his damsel."

"Yea," she said, "that is sooth."

He went on: "But the face which thou bearedst yesterday against thy will, amidst all the people, that was because thou hadst seen my sister the Sunbeam for the first time, and Face-of-god with her, hand clinging to hand, lip longing for lip, desire unsatisfied, but glad with all hope."

She laid hand upon hand in the lap of her gown, and looked down, and her voice trembled as she said:

"Doth it avail to talk of this?"

He said: "I know not: it may avail; for I am grieved, and shall be whilst thou art grieved; and it is my wont to strive with my griefs till I amend them."

She turned to him with kind eyes and said:

"O mighty man, canst thou clear away the tangle which besetteth the soul of her whose hope hath bewrayed her? Canst thou make hope grow up in her heart? Friend, I will tell thee that when I wed, I shall wed for the sake of the kindred, hoping for no

joy therein. Yea, or if by some chance the desire of man came again into my heart, I should strive with it to rid myself of it; for I should know of it that it was but a wasting folly, that should but beguile me, and wound me, and depart, leaving me empty of joy and heedless of life."

He shook his head and said: "Even so thou deemest now; but one day it shall be otherwise. Or dost thou love thy sorrow? I tell thee, as it wears thee and wears thee, thou shalt hate it, and strive to shake it off."

"Nay, nay," she said; "I love it not; for not only it grieveth me, but also it beateth me down and belittleth me."

"Good is that," said he. "I know how strong thine heart is. Now, wilt thou take mine hand, which is verily the hand of thy friend, and remember what I have told thee of my grief which cannot be sundered from thine? Shall we not talk more concerning this? For surely I shall soon see thee again, and often; since the Warrior, who loveth me belike, leadeth thee into fellowship with me. Yea, I tell thee, O friend, that in that fellowship shalt thou find both the seed of hope, and the sun of desire that shall quicken it."

Therewith he arose and stood before her, and held out to her his hand all hardened with the sword-hilt, and she took it, and stood up facing him, and said:

"This much will I tell thee, O friend; that what I have said to thee this hour, I thought not to have said to any man; or to talk with a man of the grief that weareth me, or to suffer him to see my tears; and marvellous I deem it of thee, for all thy might, that thou hast drawn this speech from out of me, and left me neither angry nor ashamed, in spite of these tears; and thou whom I have known not, though thou knewest me!

"But now it were best that thou depart, and get thee home to the House of the Face, where I was once so frequent; for I wot that thou hast much to do; and as thou sayest, it will be in warfare that I shall see thee. Now I thank thee for thy words and the thought that thou hast had of me, and the pain which thou hast taken to heal my hurt: I thank thee, I thank thee, for as grievous as it is to show one's hurts even to a friend."

He said: "O Bride, I thank thee for hearkening to my tale; and one day shall I thank thee much more. Mayest thou fare well in the Field and amidst the Folk!"

Therewith he kissed her hand, and turned away, and went across the meadow and the stream, glad at heart and blithe with everyone; for kindness grew in him as gladness grew.

CHAPTER XXXVII

OF THE FOLK-MOTE OF THE DALESMEN, THE SHEPHERD-FOLK, AND THE WOODLAND CARLES: THE BANNER OF THE WOLF DISPLAYED

Now came the day of the Great Folk-mote, and there was much thronging from everywhere to the Mote-stead, but most from Burgstead itself, whereas few of the Dale-dwellers who had been at the Fair had gone back home. Albeit some of the Shepherds and of the Dalesmen of the westernmost Dale had brought light tents, and tilted themselves in in the night before the Mote down in the meadows below the Mote-stead. From early morning there had been a stream of folk on the Portway setting westward; and many came thus early that they might hold converse with friends and

well-wishers; and some that they might disport them in the woods. Men went in no ordered bands, as the Burgstead men at least had done on the day of the Weapon-show, save that a few of them who were arrayed the bravest gathered about the banners, and went with them to the Mote-stead; for all the banners must needs be there.

The Folk-mote was to be hallowed-in three hours before noon, as all men knew; therefore an hour before that time were all men of the Dale and the Shepherds assembled that might be looked for, save the Alderman and the chieftains with the banner of the Burg, and these were not like to come many minutes before the Hallowing. Folk were gathered on the Field in such wise, that the men-at-arms made a great ring round about the Doom-ring (albeit there were many old men there, girt with swords that they should never heave up again in battle), so that without that ring there was nought save women and children. But when all the other Houses were assembled, men looked around, and beheld the place of the Woodlanders that it was empty; and they marvelled that they were thus belated. For now all was ready, and a watcher had gone up to the Tower on the height, and had with him the great Horn of Warning, which could be heard past the Mote-stead and a great way down the Dale: and if he saw foes coming from the East he should blow one blast; if from the South, two; if from the West, three; if from the North, four.

So half an hour from the appointed time of Hallowing rose the rumour that the Alderman was on the road, and presently they of the women who were on the outside of the throng, by drawing nigh to the edge of the sheer rock, could behold the Banner of the Burg on the Portway, and soon after could see the wain, done about with green boughs, wherein sat

the chieftains in their glittering war-gear. Speedily they spread the tidings, and a confused shout went up into the air; and in a little while the wain stayed on Wildlake's Way at the bottom of the steep slope that went up to the Mote-stead, and the banner of the Burg came on proudly up the hill. Soon all men beheld it, and saw that the tall Hall-face bore it in front of his brother Face-of-god, who came on gleaming in war-gear better than most men had seen; which was indeed of his father's fashioning, and his father's gift to him that morning.

After Face-of-god came the Alderman, and with him Folk-might leading the Sun-beam by the hand, and then Stone-face and the Elder of the Dale-wardens; and then the six Burg-wardens: as to the other Dale-wardens, they were in their places on the Field.

So now those who had been standing up turned their faces toward the Altar of the Gods, and those who had been sitting down sprang to their feet, and the confused rumour of the throng rose into a clear shout as the chieftains went to their places, and sat them down on the turf-seats amidst the Doom-ring facing the Speech-hill and the Altar of the Gods. Amidmost sat the Alderman, on his right hand Face-of-god, and out from him Hall-face, and then Stone-face and three of the Wardens; but on his left hand sat first the two Guests, then the Elder of the Dale-wardens, and then the other three Burg-wardens; as for the Banner of the Burg, its staff was stuck into the earth behind them, and the Banner raised itself in the morning wind and flapped and rippled over their heads.

There then they sat, and folk abided, and it still lacked some minutes of the due time, as the Alderman wotted by the shadow of the great standing-stone betwixt him and the Altar. Therewithal came the sound of a great horn from out of the wood on the

north side, and men knew it for the horn of the Woodland Carles, and were glad ; for they could not think why they should be belated ; and now men stood up a-tiptoe and on other's shoulders to look over the heads of the women and children to behold their coming ; but their empty place was at the south-west corner of the ring of men.

So presently men beheld them marching toward their place, cleaving the throng of the women and children, a great company ; for besides that they had with them two score more of men under weapons than on the day of the Weapon-show, all their little ones and women and outworn elders were with them, some on foot, some riding on oxen and asses. In their forefront went the two signs of the Battle-shaft and the War-spear. But moreover, in front of all was borne a great staff with the cloth of a banner wrapped round about it, and tied up with a hempen yarn that it might not be seen.

Stark and mighty men they looked ; tall and lean, broad-shouldered, dark-faced. As they came amongst the throng the voice of their horn died out, and for a few moments they fared on with no sound save the tramp of their feet ; then all at once the man who bare the hidden banner lifted up one hand, and straightway they fell to singing, and with that song they came to their place. And this is some of what they sang :

O white, white Sun, what things of wonder
  Hast thou beheld from thy wall of the sky !
All the Roofs of the Rich and the grief thereünder,
  As the fear of the Earl-folk flitteth by !

Thou hast seen the Flame steal forth from the Forest
  To slay the slumber of the lands,
As the Dusky Lord whom thou abhorrest
  Clomb up to thy Burg unbuilt with hands.

Thou lookest down from thy door the golden,
  Nor batest thy wide-shining mirth,
As the ramparts fall, and the roof-trees olden
  Lie smouldering low on the burning earth.

When flitteth the half-dark night of summer
  From the face of the murder great and grim,
'Tis thou thyself and no new-comer
  Shines golden-bright on the deed undim.

Art thou our friend, O Day-dawn's Lover?
  Full oft thine hand hath sent aslant
Bright beams athwart the Wood-bear's cover,
  Where the feeble folk and the nameless haunt.

Thou hast seen us quail, thou hast seen us cower,
  Thou hast seen us crouch in the Green Abode,
While for us wert thou slaying slow hour by hour,
  And smothing down the war-rough road.

Yea, the rocks of the Waste were thy Dawns upheaving,
  To let the days of the years go through;
And thy Noons the tangled brake were cleaving
  The slow-foot seasons' deed to do.

Then gaze adown on this gift of our giving,
  For the WOLF comes wending frith and ford,
And the Folk fares forth from the dead to the living,
  For the love of the Lief by the light of the Sword.

Then ceased the song, and the whole band of the Woodlanders came pouring tumultuously into the space allotted them, like the waters pouring over a river-dam, their white swords waving aloft in the morning sunlight; and wild and strange cries rose up from amidst them, with sobbing and weeping of joy. But soon their troubled front sank back into ordered ranks, their bright blades stood upright in their hands before them, and folk looked on their company, and deemed it the very Terror of battle and Render of the ranks

of war. Right well were they armed; for though many of their weapons were ancient and somewhat worn, yet were they the work of good smiths of old days; and moreover, if any of them lacked good war-gear of his own, that had the Alderman and his sons made good to them.

But before the hedge of steel stood the two tall men who held in their hands the war-tokens of the Battle-shaft and the War-spear, and betwixt them stood one who was indeed the tallest man of the whole assembly, who held the great staff of the hidden banner. And now he reached up his hand, and plucked at the yarn that bound it, which of set purpose was but feeble, and tore it off, and then shook the staff aloft with both hands, and shouted, and lo! the Banner of the Wolf with the Sun-burst behind him, glittering-bright, new-woven by the women of the kindred, ran out in the fresh wind, and flapped and rippled before His warriors there assembled.

Then from all over the Mote-stead arose an exceeding great shout, and all men waved aloft their weapons; but the men of Shadowy Vale who were standing amidst the men of the Face knew not how to demean themselves, and some of them ran forth into the Field and leapt for joy, tossing their swords into the air, and catching them by the hilts as they fell: and amidst it all the Woodlanders now stood silent, unmoving, as men abiding the word of onset.

As for that brother and sister: the Sun-beam flushed red all over her face, and pressed her hands to her bosom, and then the passion of tears over-mastered her, and her breast heaved, and the tears gushed out of her eyes, and her body was shaken with weeping. But Folk-might sat still, looking straight before him, his eyes glittering, his teeth set, his right hand clutching hard at the hilts of his sword, which lay naked

across his knees. And the Bride, who stood clad in her begemmed and glittering war-array in the forefront of the Men of the Steer, nigh unto the seats of the chieftains, beheld Folk-might, and her face flushed and brightened, and still she looked upon him. The Alderman's face was as of one pleased and proud; yet was its joy shadowed as it were by a cloud of compassion. Face-of-god sat like the very image of the War-god, and stirred not, nor looked toward the Sunbeam; for still the thought of the after-grief of battle, and the death of friends and folk that loved him, lay heavy on his heart, for all that it beat wildly at the shouting of the men.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

OF THE GREAT FOLK-MOTE: ATONEMENTS GIVEN, AND MEN MADE SACKLESS

Amidst the clamour uprose the Alderman; for it was clear to all men that the Folk-mote should be holden at once, and the matters of the War, and the Fellowship, and the choosing of the War-leader, speedily dealt with. So the Alderman fell to hallowing-in the Folk-mote: he went up to the Altar of the Gods, and took the Gold-ring off it, and did it on his arm; then he drew his sword and waved it toward the four airts, and spake; and the noise and shouting fell, and there was silence but for him:

"Herewith I hallow-in this Folk-mote of the Men of the Dale and the Sheepcotes and the Woodland, in the name of the Warrior and the Earth-god and the Fathers of the kindreds. Now let not the peace of the Mote be broken. Let not man rise against man, or bear blade or hand, or stick or stone against any.

If any man break the Peace of the Holy Mote, let him be a man accursed, a wild-beast in the Holy Places; an outcast from home and hearth, from bed and board, from mead and acre; not to be holpen with bread, nor flesh, nor wine; nor flax, nor wool, nor any cloth; nor with sword, nor shield, nor axe, nor plough-share; nor with horse, nor ox, nor ass; with no saddle-beast nor draught-beast; nor with wain, nor boat, nor way-leading; nor with fire nor water; nor with any world's wealth. Thus let him who hath cast out man be cast out by man. Now is hallowed-in the Folk-mote of the Men of the Dale and the Sheepcotes and the Woodlands."

Therewith he waved his sword again toward the four airts, and went and sat down in his place. But presently he arose again, and said:

"Now if man hath aught to say against man, and claimeth boot of any, or would lay guilt on any man's head, let him come forth and declare it; and the judges shall be named, and the case shall be tried this afternoon or to-morrow. Yet first I shall tell you that I, the Alderman of the Dalesmen, doomed one Iron-face of the House of the Face to pay a double fine, for that he drew a sword at the Gate-thing of Burgstead with the intent to break the peace thereof. Thou, Green-sleeve, bring forth the peace-breaker's fine, that Iron-face may lay the same on the Altar."

Then came forth a man from the men of the Face bearing a bag, and he brought it to Iron-face, who went up to the Altar and poured forth weighed gold from the bag thereon, and said:

"Warden of the Dale, come thou and weigh it!"

"Nay," quoth the Warden, "it needeth not, no man here doubteth thee, Alderman Iron-face."

A murmur of yeasay went up. and none had a word

to say against the Alderman, but they praised him rather: also men were eager to hear of the war, and the fellowship, and to be done with these petty matters. Then the Alderman rose again and said:

"Hath any man a grief against any other of the Kindreds of the Dale, or the Sheepcotes, or the Woodlands?"

None answered or stirred; so after he had waited a while, he said:

"Is there any who hath any guilt to lay against a Stranger, an Outlander, being such a man as he deems we can come at?"

Thereat was a stir amongst the Men of the Fleece of the Shepherds, and their ranks opened, and there came forth an ill-favoured lean old man, long-nebbed, blear-eyed, and bent, girt with a rusty old sword, but not otherwise armed. And all men knew Penny-thumb, who had been ransacked last autumn. As he came forth, it seemed as if his neighbours had been trying to hold him back; but a stout, broad-shouldered man, black-haired and red-bearded, made way for the old man, and led him out of the throng, and stood by him; and this man was well armed at all points, and looked a doughty carle. He stood side by side with Penny-thumb, right in front of the men of his house, and looked about him at first somewhat uneasily, as though he were ashamed of his fellow; but though many smiled, none laughed aloud; and they forbore, partly because they knew the man to be a good man, partly because of the solemn tide of the Folk-mote, and partly in sooth because they wished all this to be over, and were as men who had no time for empty mirth.

Then said the Alderman: "What wouldest thou, Penny-thumb, and thou, Bristler, son of Brightling?"

Then Penny-thumb began to speak in a high squeaky voice: "Alderman, and Lord of the Folk!"—But therewithal Bristler pulled him back, and said:

"I am the man who hath taken this quarrel upon me, and have sworn upon the Holy Boar to carry this feud through; and we deem, Alderman, that if they who slew Rusty and ransacked Penny-thumb be not known now, yet they soon may be."

As he spake, came forth those three men of the Shepherds and the two Dalesmen who had sworn with him on the Holy Boar. Then up stood Folk-might, and came forth into the field, and said:

"Bristler, son of Brightling, and ye other good men and true, it is but sooth that the ransackers and the slayer may soon be known; and here I declare them unto you: I it was and none other who slew Rusty; and I was the leader of those who ransacked Penny-thumb, and cowed Harts-bane of Greentofts. As for the slaying of Rusty, I slew him because he chased me, and would not forbear, so that I must either slay or be slain, as hath befallen me erewhile, and will befall again, methinks. As for the ransacking of Penny-thumb, I needed the goods that I took, and he needed them not, since he neither used them, nor gave them away, and, they being gone, he hath lived no worser than aforetime. Now I say, that if ye will take the outlawry off me, which, as I hear, ye laid upon me, not knowing me, then will I handsel self-doom to thee, Bristler, if thou wilt bear thy grief to purse, and I will pay thee what thou wilt out of hand; or if perchance thou wilt call me to Holm, thither will I go, if thou and I come unslain out of this war. As to the ransacking and cowing of Harts-bane, I say that I am sackless therein, because the man is but a ruffler and a man of violence, and hath cowed many men of the Dale; and if he gainsay me, then do I call him to the

Holm after this war is over; either him or any man who will take his place before my sword."

Then he held his peace, and man spake to man, and a murmur arose, as they said for the more part that it was a fair and manly offer. But Bristler called his fellows and Penny-thumb to him, and they spake together; and sometimes Penny-thumb's shrill squeak was heard above the deep-voiced talk of the others; for he was a man that harboured malice. But at last Bristler spake out and said:

"Tall man, we know that thou art a chieftain and of good will to the men of the Dale and their friends, and that want drave thee to the ransacking, and need to the manslaying, and neither the living nor the dead to whom thou art guilty are to be called good men; therefore will I bring the matter to purse, if thou wilt handsel me self-doom."

"Yea, even so let it be," quoth Folk-might; and stepped forward and took Bristler by the hand, and handselled him self-doom. Then said Bristler:

"Though Rusty was no good man, and though he followed thee to slay thee, yet was he in his right therein, since he was following up his goodman's gear; therefore shalt thou pay a full blood-wite for him, that is to say, the worth of three hundreds in weed-stuff in whatso goods thou wilt. As for the ransacking of Penny-thumb, he shall deem himself well paid if thou give him four hundreds in weed-stuff for that which thou didst borrow of him."

Then Penny-thumb set up his squeak again, but no man hearkened to him, and each man said to his neighbour that it was well doomed of Bristler, and neither too much nor too little. But Folk-might bade Wood-wont to bring thither to him that which he had borne to the Mote; and he brought forth a big sack, and Folk-might emptied it on the earth, and lo! the

silver rings of the slain felons, and they lay in a heap on the green field, and they were the best of silver. Then the Elder of the Dale-wardens weighed out from the heap the blood-wite for Rusty, according to the due measure of the hundred in weed-stuff, and delivered it unto Bristler. And Folk-might said:

"Draw nigh now, Penny-thumb, and take what thou wilt of this gear, which I need not, and grudge not at me henceforward."

But Penny-thumb was afraid, and abode where he was; and Bristler laughed, and said: "Take it, goodman, take it; spare not other men's goods as thou dost thine own."

And Folk-might stood by, smiling faintly: so Penny-thumb plucked up a heart, and drew nigh trembling, and took what he durst from that heap; and all that stood by said that he had gotten a full double of what had been awarded to him. But as for him, he went his ways straight from the Mote-stead, and made no stay till he had gotten him home, and laid the silver up in a strong coffer; and thereafter he bewailed him sorely that he had not taken the double of that which he took, since none would have said him nay.

When he was gone, the Alderman arose and said:

"Now, since the fines have been paid duly and freely, according to the dooming of Bristler, take we off the outlawry from Folk-might and his fellows, and account them to be sackless before us."

Then he called for other cases; but no man had aught more to bring forward against any man, either of the Kindreds or the Strangers.

CHAPTER XXXIX

OF THE GREAT FOLK-MOTE: MEN TAKE REDE OF THE WAR-FARING, THE FELLOWSHIP, AND THE WAR-LEADER. FOLK-MIGHT TELLETH WHENCE HIS PEOPLE CAME. THE FOLK-MOTE SUNDERED

Now a great silence fell upon the throng, and they stood as men abiding some new matter. Unto them arose the Alderman, and said:

"Men of the Dale, and ye Shepherds and Woodlanders; it is well known to you that we have foemen in the wood and beyond it; and now have we gotten sure tidings, that they will not abide at home or in the wood, but are minded to fall upon us at home. Now therefore I will not ask you whether ye will have peace or war; for with these foemen ye may have peace no otherwise save by war. But if ye think with me, three things have ye to determine: first, whether ye will abide your foes in your own houses, or will go meet them at theirs; next, whether ye will take to you as fellows in arms a valiant folk of the children of the Gods, who are foemen to our foemen; and lastly, what man ye will have to be your War-leader. Now, I bid all those here assembled, to speak hereof, any man of them that will, either what they may have conceived in their own minds, or what their kindred may have put into their mouths to speak."

Therewith he sat down, and in a little while came forth old Hall-ward of the House of the Steer, and stood before the Alderman, and said: "O Alderman, all we say: Since war is awake we will not tarry, but will go meet our foes while it is yet time. The valiant

men of whom thou tellest shall be our fellows, were there but three of them. We know no better War-leader than Face-of-god of the House of the Face. Let him lead us."

Therewith he went his ways; and next came forth War-well, and said: "The House of the Bridge would have Face-of-god for War-leader, these tall men for fellows, and the shortest way to meet the foe." And he went back to his place.

Next came Fox of Upton, and said: "Time presses, or much might be spoken. Thus saith the House of the Bull: Let us go meet the foe, and take these valiant strangers for way-leaders, and Face-of-god for War-leader." And he also went back again.

Then came forth two men together, an old man and a young, and the old man spake as soon as he stood still: "The Men of the Vine bid me say their will: They will not stay at home to have their houses burned over their heads, themselves slain on their own hearths, and their wives haled off to thralldom. They will take any man for their fellow in arms who will smite stark strokes on their side. They know Face-of-god, and were liefer of him for War-leader than any other, and they will follow him wheresoever he leadeth. Thus my kindred biddeth me say, and I hight Fork-beard of Lea. If I live through this war, I shall have lived through five."

Therewith he went back to his place; but the young man lifted up his voice and said: "To all this I say yea, and so am I bidden by the kindred of the Sickle: I am Red-beard of the Knolls, the son of my father." And he went to his place again.

Then came forth Stone-face, and said: "The House of the Face saith: Lead us through the wood, O Face-of-god, thou War-leader, and ye warriors of the Wolf. I am Stone-face, as men know, and this word

hath been given to me by the kindred." And he took his place again.

Then came forth together the three chiefs of the Shepherds, to wit Hound-under-Greenbury, Strongitharm, and the Hyllier; and Strongitharm spake for all three, and said:

"The Men of Greenbury, and they of the Fleece and the Thorn, are of one accord, and bid us say that they are well pleased to have Face-of-god for War-leader; and that they will follow him and the warriors of the Wolf to live or die with them; and that they are ready to go meet the foe at once, and will not skulk behind the walls of Greenbury."

Therewith the three went back again to their places.

Then came forth that tall man that bare the Banner of the Wolf, when he had given the staff into the hands of him who stood next. He came and stood over against the seat of the chieftains; and for a while he could say no word, but stood struggling with the strong passion of his joy; but at last he lifted his hands aloft, and cried out in a loud voice:

"O war, war! O death! O wounding and grief! O loss of friends and kindred! let all this be rather than the drawing back of meeting hands and the sundering of yearning hearts!" and he went back hastily to his place. But from the ranks of the Woodlanders ran forth a young man, and cried out:

"As is the word of Red-wolf, so is my word, Bearsbane of Carlstead; and this is the word which our little Folk hath put into our mouths; and O! that our hands may show the meaning of our mouths; for nought else can."

Then indeed went up a great shout, though many forebore to cry out; for now were they too much moved for words or sounds. And in special was Face-of-god moved; and he scarce knew which way to look, lest

he should break out into sobs and weeping; for of late he had been much among the Woodlanders, and loved them much.

Then all the noise and clamour fell, and it was to men as if they who had come thither a folk, had now become an host of war.

But once again the Alderman rose up and spake:

"Now have ye yeasaid three things: That we take Face-of-god of the House of the Face for our War-leader; that we fare under weapons at once against them who would murder us; and that we take the valiant Folk of the Wolf for our fellows in arms."

Therewith he stayed his speech, and this time the shout arose clear and most mighty, with the tossing up of swords and the clashing of weapons on shields.

Then he said: "Now, if any man will speak, here is the War-leader, and here is the chief of our new friends, to answer to whatso any of the kindred would have answered."

Thereon came forth the Fiddle from amongst the Men of the Sickle, and drew somewhat nigh to the Alderman, and said: "Alderman, we would ask of the War-leader if he hath devised the manner of our assembling, and the way of our war-faring, and the day of our hosting. More than this I will not ask of him, because we wot that in so great an assembly it may be that the foe may have some spy of whom we wot not; and though this be not likely, yet some folk may babble; therefore it is best for the wise to be wise everywhere and always. Therefore my rede it is, that no man ask any more concerning this, but let it lie with the War-leader to bring us face to face with the foe as speedily as he may."

All men said that this was well counselled. But Face-of-god arose and said: "Ye Men of the Dale, ye Shepherds and Woodlanders, meseemeth the Fiddle

hath spoken wisely. Now therefore I answer him and say, that I have so ordered everything since the Gate-thing was holden at Burgstead, that we may come face to face with the foemen by the shortest of roads. Every man shall be duly summoned to the Hosting, and if any man fail, let it be accounted a shame to him for ever."

A great shout followed on his words, and he sat down again. But Fox of Upton came forth and said:

"O Alderman, we have yeasaid the fellowship of the valiant men who have come to us from out of the waste; but this we have done, not because we have known them, otherwise than by what our kinsman Face-of-god hath told us concerning them, but because we have seen clearly that they will be of much avail to us in our warfare. Now, therefore, if the tall chieftain who sitteth beside thee were to do us to wit what he is, and whence he and his are come, it were well, and fain were we thereof; but if he listeth not to tell us, that also shall be well."

Then arose Folk-might in his place; but or ever he could open his mouth to speak, the tall Red-wolf strode forward bearing with him the Banner of the Wolf and the Sun-burst, and came and stood beside him; and the wind ran through the folds of the banner, and rippled it out above the heads of those twain. Then Folk-might spake and said:

"O Men of the Dale and the Sheepcotes, I will do as ye bid me do;
And fain were ye of the story if every deal ye knew.
But long, long were its telling, were I to tell it all:
Let it bide till the Cup of Deliverance ye drink from hall to hall.

"Like you we be of the kindreds, of the Sons of the Gods we come,
Midst the Mid-earth's mighty Woodland of old we had our home;

But of older time we abided 'neath the mountains of the Earth,
O'er which the Sun ariseth to waken woe and mirth.
Great were we then and many; but the long days wore us thin,
And war, wherein the winner hath weary work to win.
And the woodland wall behind us e'en like ourselves was worn,
And the tramp of the hosts of the foemen adown its glades was borne
On the wind that bent our wheat-fields. So in the morn we rose,
And left behind the stubble and the autumn-fruited close,
And went our ways to the westward, nor turned aback to see
The glare of our burning houses rise over brake and tree.
But the foe was fierce and speedy, nor long they tarried there,
And through the woods of battle our laden wains must fare;
And the Sons of the Wolf were minished, and the maids of the Wolf waxed few,
As amidst the victory-singing we fared the wild-wood through.

"So saith the ancient story, that west and west we went,
And many a day of battle we had in brake, on bent;
Whilst here a while we tarried, and there we hastened on,
And still the battle-harvest from many a folk we won.

"Of the tale of the days who wotteth? Of the years what man can tell,
While the Sons of the Wolf were wandering, and knew not where to dwell?
But at last we clomb the mountains, and mickle was our toil,
As high the spear-wood clambered of the drivers of the spoil;
And tangled were the passes and the beacons flared behind,
And the horns of gathering onset came up upon the wind.

So saith the ancient story, that we stood in a mountain-
cleft,
Where the ways and the valleys sundered to the right
hand and the left.
There in the place of sundering all woeful was the rede;
We knew no land before us, and behind was heavy need.
As the sword cleaves through the byrny, so there the
mountain flank
Cleft through the God-kin's people; and ne'er again we
drank
The wine of war together, or feasted side by side
In the Feast-hall of the Warrior on the fruit of the battle-
tide.
For there we turned and sundered; unto the North we
went
And up along the waters, and the clattering stony bent;
And unto the South and the Sheepcotes down went our
sister's sons;
And O for the years passed over since we saw those
valiant ones!"

He ceased, and laid his right hand on the banner-staff a little below the left hand of Red-wolf; and men were so keen to hear each word that he spake, that there was no cry nor sound of voices when he had done, only the sound of the rippling banner of the Wolf over the heads of those twain. The Sun-beam bowed her head now, and wept silently. But the Bride, she had drawn her sword, and held it upright in her hand before her, and the sun smote fire from out of it.

Then it was but a little while before Red-wolf lifted up his voice, and sang:

"Hearken a wonder, O Folk of the Field,
How they that did sunder stand shield beside shield!

Lo! the old wont and manner by fearless folk made,
On the Bole of the Banner the brothers' hands laid.

Lo! here the token of what hath betid!
Grown whole is the broken, found that which was hid.

Now one way we follow whate'er shall befall ;
As seeketh the swallow his yesteryear's hall.

Seldom folk fewer to fight-stead hath fared ;
Ne'er have men truer the battle-reed bared.

Grey locks now I carry, and old am I grown,
Nor looked I to tarry to meet with mine own.

For we who remember the deeds of old days
Were nought but the ember of battle ablaze.

For what man might aid us ? what deed and what day
Should come where Weird laid us aloof from the way ?

What man save that other of Twain rent apart,
Our war-friend, our Brother, the piece of our heart.

Then hearken the wonder how shield beside shield
The twain that did sunder wend down to the Field !"

Now when he had made an end, men could no longer forbear the shout ; and it went up into the heavens, and was borne by the west-wind down the Dale to the ears of the stay-at-home women and men unmeet to go abroad, and it quickened their blood and the spirits within them as they heard it, and they smiled and were fain ; for they knew that their kinsfolk were glad.

But when there was quiet on the Mote-field again, Folk-might spake again and said :

" It is sooth that my Brother sayeth, and that now again we wend,
All the Sons of the Wolf together, till the trouble hath an end.
But as for that tale of the Ancients, it saith that we who went
To the northward, climbed and stumbled o'er many a stony bent,
Till we happed on that isle of the waste-land, and the grass of Shadowy Vale,
Where we dwelt till we throve a little, and felt our might avail.

Then we fared abroad from the shadow and the little-lighted hold,
And the increase fell to the valiant, and the spoil to the battle-bold,
And never a man gainsaid us with the weapons in our hands;
And in Silverdale the happy we gat us life and lands.

"So wore the years o'er-wealthy; and meseemeth that ye know
How we sowed and reaped destruction, and the Day of the overthrow:
How we leaned on the staff we had broken, and put our lives in the hand
Of those whom we had vanquished and the feeble of the land;
And these were the stone of stumbling, and the burden not to be borne,
When the battle-blast fell on us and our day was over-worn.
Thus then did our wealth bewray us, and left us wise and sad;
And to you, bold men, it falleth once more to make us glad,
If so your hearts are bidding, and ye deem the deed of worth.
Such were we; what we shall be, 'tis yours to say henceforth."

He said furthermore: "How great we have been I have told you already; and ye shall see for yourselves how little we be now. Is it enough, and will ye have us for friends and brothers? How say ye?"

They answered with shout upon shout, so that all the place and the wild-wood round about was full of the voice of their crying; but when the clamour fell, then spake the Alderman and said:

"Friend, and chieftain of the Wolf, thou mayst hear by this shouting of the people that we have no mind to naysay our yeasay. And know that it is not our

use and manner to seek the strong for friends, and to thrust aside the weak; but rather to choose for our friends them who are of like mind to us, men in whom we put our trust. From henceforth then there is brotherhood between us; we are yours, and ye are ours; and let this endure for ever!"

Then were all men full of joy; and now at last the battle seemed at hand, and the peace beyond the battle.

Then men brought the hallowed beasts all garlanded with flowers into the Doom-ring, and there were they slain and offered up unto the Gods, to wit the Warrior, the Earth-god, and the Fathers; and thereafter was solemn feast holden on the Field of the Folk-mote, and all men were fain and merry. Nevertheless, not all men abode there the feast through; for or ever the afternoon was well worn, were many men wending along the Portway eastward toward the Upper Dale, each man in his war-gear and with a scrip hung about him; and these were they who were bound for the trysting-place and the journey over the waste.

So the Folk-mote was sundered; and men went to their houses, and there abode in peace the time of their summoning; since they wotted well that the Hosting was afoot.

But as for the Woodlanders, who were at the Mote-stead with all their folk, women, children, and old men, they went not back again to Carlstead; but prayed the neighbours of the Middle Dale to suffer them to abide there awhile, which they yeasaid with a good will. So the Woodlanders tilted themselves in, the more part of them, down in the meadows below the Mote-stead, along either side of Wildlake's Way; but their ancient folk, and some of the women and children, the neighbours would have into their houses, and the rest they furnished with victual and all that they

needed without price, looking upon them as their very guests. For indeed they deemed that they could see that these men would never return to Carlstead, but would abide with the Men of the Wolf in Silverdale, once it were won. And this they deemed but meet and right, yet were they sorry thereof; for the Woodlanders were well beloved of all the Dalesmen; and now that they had gotten to know that they were come of so noble a kindred, they were better beloved yet, and more looked upon.

CHAPTER XL

OF THE HOSTING IN SHADOWY VALE

It was on the evening of the fourth day after the Folk-mote that there came through the Waste to the rocky edge of Shadowy Vale a band of some fifteen score of men-at-arms, and with them a multitude of women and children and old men, some afoot, some riding on asses and bullocks; and with them were sumpter asses and neat laden with household goods, and a few goats and kine. And this was the whole folk of the Woodlanders come to the Hosting in Shadowy Vale and the Home of the Children of the Wolf. Their leaders of the way were Wood-father and Wood-wont and two other carles of Shadowy Vale; and Red-wolf the tall, and Bears-bane and War-grove were the captains and chieftains of their company.

Thus then they entered into the narrow pass aforesaid, which was the ingate to the Vale from the Waste, and little by little its dimness swallowed up their long line. As they went by the place where the lowering of the rock-wall gave a glimpse of the valley, they looked down into it as Face-of-god had done, but much

change was there in little time. There was the black wall of crags on the other side stretching down to the ghyll of the great Force; there ran the deep green waters of the Shivering Flood; but the grass which Face-of-god had seen naked of everything but a few kine, thereon now the tents of men stood thick. Their hearts swelled within them as they beheld it, but they forebore the shout and the cry till they should be well within the Vale, and so went down silently into the darkness. But as their eyes caught that dim image of the Wolf on the wall of the pass, man pointed it out to man, and not a few turned and kissed it hurriedly; and to them it seemed that many a kiss had been laid on that dear token since the days of old, and that the hard stone had been worn away by the fervent lips of men, and that the air of the mirk place yet quivered with the vows sworn over the sword-blade.

But down through the dark they went, and so came on to the stony scree at the end of the pass and into the Vale; and the whole Folk save the three chieftains flowed over it and stood about it down on the level grass of the Vale. But those three stood yet on the top of the scree, bearing the war-signs of the Shaft and the Spear, and betwixt them the banner of the Wolf and the Sun-burst newly displayed to the winds of Shadowy Vale.

Up and down the Vale they looked, and saw before the tents of men the old familiar banners of Burgdale rising and falling in the evening wind. But amidst of the Doom-ring was pitched a great banner, whereon was done the image of the Wolf with red gaping jaws on a field of green; and about him stood other banners, to wit, The Silver Arm on a red field, the Red Hand on a white field, and on green fields both, the Golden Bushel and the Ragged Sword.

All about the plain shone glittering war-gear of men

as they moved hither and thither, and a stream of folk began at once to draw toward the scree to look on those new-comers; and amidst the helmed Burgdalers and the white-coated Shepherds went the tall men of the Wolf, bare-headed and unarmed save for their swords, mingled with the fair strong women of the kindred, treading barefoot the soft grass of their own Vale.

Presently there was a great throng gathered round about the Woodlanders, and each man as he joined it waved hand or weapon toward them, and the joy of their welcome sent a confused clamour through the air. Then forth from the throng stepped Folk-might, unarmed save his sword, and behind him was Face-of-god, in his war-gear save his helm, hand in hand with the Sun-beam, who was clad in her goodly flowered green kirtle, her feet naked like her sisters of the kindred.

Then Folk-might cried aloud: "A full and free greeting to our brothers! Well be ye, O Sons of our Ancient Fathers! And to-day are ye the dearer to us because we see that ye have brought us a gift, to wit, your wives and children, and your grandsires unmeet for war. By this token we see how great is your trust in us, and that it is your meaning never to sunder from us again. O well be ye; well be ye!"

Then spake Red-wolf, and said: "Ye Sons of the Wolf, who parted from us of old time in that cleft of the mountains, it is our very selves that we give unto you; and these are a part of ourselves; how then should we leave them behind us? Bear witness, O men of Burgdale and the Sheepcotes, that we have become one Folk with the men of Shadowy Vale, never to be sundered again!"

Then all that multitude shouted with a loud voice; and when the shout had died away, Folk-might spake again:

"O Warriors of the Sundering, here shall your

wives and children abide, while we go a little journey to rejoice our hearts with the hard handplay, and to take to us that which we have missed: and to-morrow morn is appointed for this same journey, unless ye be over foot-weary with the ways of the Waste."

Red-wolf smiled as he answered: "This ye say in jest, brother; for ye may see that our day's journey hath not been over-much for our old men; how then should it weary those who may yet bear the sword? We are ready for the road and eager for the handplay."

"This is well," said Folk-might, "and what was to be looked for. Therefore, brother, do ye and your counsel-mates come straightway to the Hall of the Wolf; wherein, after ye have eaten and drunken, shall we take counsel with our brethren of Burgdale and the Sheepcotes, so that all may be ordered for battle!"

Said Red-wolf: "Good is that, if we must needs abide till to-morrow; for verily we came not hither to eat and drink and rest our bodies; but it must be as ye will have it."

Then the Sun-beam left the hand of Face-of-god and came forward, and held out both her palms to the Woodland-folk, and spake in a voice that was heard afar, though it were a woman's, so clear and sweet it was; and she said:

"O Warriors of the Sundering, ye who be not needed in the Hall, and ye our sisters with your little ones and your fathers, come now to us and down to the tents which we have arrayed for you, and there think for a little that we are all at our very home that we long for and have yet to win, and be ye merry with us and make us merry."

Therewith she stepped forward daintily and entered into their throng, and took an old man of the Woodlanders by the hand, and kissed his cheek and led him away, and the coming rest seemed sweet to him. And

then came other women of the Vale, kind and fair and smiling, and led away, some an old mother of the Woodlanders, some a young wife, some a pair of lads; and not a few forsooth kissed and embraced the stark warriors, and went away with them toward the tents, which stood along the side of the Shivering Flood where it was at its quietest; for there was the grass the softest and most abundant. There on the green grass were tables arrayed, and lamps were hung above them on spears, to be litten when the daylight should fail. And the best of the victual which the Vale could give was spread on the boards, along with wine and dainties, bought in Silverdale, or on the edges of the Westland with sword-strokes and arrow-flight.

There then they feasted and were merry; and the Sunbeam and Bow-may and the other women of the Vale served them at table, and were very blithe with them, caressing them with soft words, and with clipping and kissing, as folk who were grown exceeding dear to them; so that that eve of battle was softer and sweeter to them than any hour of their life. With these feasters were God-swain and Spear-fist of the delivered thralls of Silverdale as glad as glad might be; but Wolf-stone their eldest was gone with Dallach to the Council in the Hall.

The men of Burgdale and the Shepherds feasted otherwhere in all content, nor lacked folk of the Vale to serve them. Amongst the men of the Face were the ten delivered thralls who had heart to meet their masters in arms: seven of them were of Rosedale and three of Silverdale.

The Bride was with her kindred of the Steer, with whom were many men of Shadowy Vale, and she served her friends and fellows clad in her war-gear, save helm and hauberk, bearing herself as one who is serving dear guests. And men equalled her for her

beauty to the Gods of the High Place and the Choosers of the Slain; and they who had not beheld her before marvelled at her, and her loveliness held all men's hearts in a net of desire, so that they forebore their meat to gaze upon her; and if perchance her hand touched some young man, or her cheek or sweet-breathed mouth came nigh to his face, he became bewildered and wist not where he was, nor what to do. Yet was she as lowly and simple of speech and demeanour as if she were a gooseherd of fourteen winters.

In the Hall was a goodly company, and all the leaders of the Folk were therein, and Folk-might and the War-leader sitting in the midst of those stone seats on the dais. There then they agreed on the whole ordering of the battle and the wending of the host, as shall be told later on; and this matter was long a-doing, and when it was done, men went to their places to sleep, for the night was well worn.

But when men had departed and all was still, Folk-might, light-clad and without a weapon, left the Hall and walked briskly toward the nether end of the Vale. He passed by all the tents, the last whereof were of the House of the Steer, and came to a place where was a great rock rising straight up from the plain like sheaves of black staves standing close together; and it was called Staff-stone, and tales of the elves had been told concerning it, so that Stone-face had beheld it gladly the day before.

The moon was just shining into Shadowy Vale, and the grass was bright wheresoever the shadows of the high cliffs were not, and the face of Staff-stone shone bright grey as Folk-might came within sight of it, and he beheld someone sitting at the base of the rock, and as he drew nigher he saw that it was a woman, and knew her for the Bride; for he had prayed her to

abide him there that night, because it was nigh to the tents of the House of the Steer; and his heart was glad as he drew nigh to her.

She sat quietly on a fragment of the black rock, clad as she had been all day, in her glittering kirtle, but without hauberk or helm, a wreath of wind-flowers about her head, her feet crossed over each other, her hands laid palm uppermost in her lap. She moved not as he drew nigh, but said in a gentle voice when he was close to her:

"Chief of the Wolf, great warrior, thou wouldest speak with me; and good it is that friends should talk together on the eve of battle, when they may never meet alive again."

He said: "My talk shall not be long; for thou and I both must sleep to-night, since there is work to hand to-morrow. Now since, as thou sayest, O fairest of women, we may never meet again alive, I ask thee now at this hour, when we both live and are near to one another, to suffer me to speak to thee of my love of thee and desire for thee. Surely thou, who art the sweetest of all things the Gods and the kindreds have made, wilt not gainsay me this?"

She said very sweetly, yet smiling: "Brother of my father's sons, how can I gainsay thee thy speech? Nay, hast thou not said it? What more canst thou add to it that will have fresh meaning to mine ears?"

He said: "Thou sayest sooth: might I then but kiss thine hand?"

She said, no longer smiling: "Yea surely, even so may all men do who can be called my friends—and thou art much my friend."

He took her hand and kissed it, and held it thereafter; nor did she draw it away. The moon shone brightly on them; but by its light he could not see if she reddened, but he deemed that her face was

troubled. Then he said: "It were better for me if I might kiss thy face, and take thee in mine arms."

Then said she: "This only shall a man do with me when I long to do the like with him. And since thou art so much my friend, I will tell thee that as for this longing, I have it not. Bethink thee what a little while it is since the lack of another man's love grieved me sorely."

"The time is short," said Folk-might, "if we tell up the hours thereof; but in that short space have a many things betid."

She said: "Dost thou know, canst thou guess, how sorely ashamed I went amongst my people? I durst look no man in the face for the aching of mine heart, which methought all might see through my face."

"I knew it well," he said; "yet of me wert thou not ashamed but a little while ago, when thou didst tell me of thy grief."

She said: "True it is; and thou wert kind to me. Thou didst become a dear friend to me, methought."

"And wilt thou hurt a dear friend?" said he.

"O no," she said, "if I might do otherwise. Yet how if I might not choose? Shall there be no forgiveness for me then?"

He answered nothing; and still he held her hand that strove not to be gone from his, and she cast down her eyes. Then he spake in a while:

"My friend, I have been thinking of thee and of me; and now hearken: if thou wilt declare that thou feelest no sweetness embracing thine heart when I say that I desire thee sorely, as now I say it; or when I kiss thine hand, as now I kiss it; or when I pray thee to suffer me to cast mine arms about thee and kiss thy face, as now I pray it: if thou wilt say this, then will I take thee by the hand straightway,

and lead thee to the tents of the House of the Steer, and say farewell to thee till the battle is over. Canst thou say this out of the truth of thine heart?"

She said: "What then if I cannot say this word? What then?"

But he answered nothing; and she sat still a little while, and then arose and stood before him, looking him in the eyes, and said:

"I cannot say it."

Then he caught her in his arms and strained her to him, and then kissed her lips and her face again and again, and she strove not with him. But at last she said:

"Yet after all this shalt thou lead me back to my folk straightway; and when the battle is done, if both we are living, then shall we speak more thereof."

So he took her hand and led her on toward the tents of the Steer, and for a while he spake nought; for he doubted himself, what he should say; but at last he spake:

"Now is this better for me than if it had not been, whether I live or whether I die. Yet thou hast not said that thou lovest me and desirest me."

"Wilt thou compel me?" she said. "To-night I may not say it. Who shall say what words my lips shall fashion when we stand together victorious in Silver-dale; then indeed may the time seem long from now."

He said: "Yea, true is that; yet once again I say that so measured long and long is the time since first I saw thee in Burgdale before thou knewest me. Yet now I will not bicker with thee, for be sure that I am glad at heart. And lo you! our feet have brought us to the tents of thy people. All good go with thee!"

"And with thee, sweet friend," she said. Then she lingered a little, turning her head toward the tents, and then turned her face toward him and laid her hand on his neck, and drew his head adown to her and kissed

his cheek, and therewith swiftly and lightly departed from him.

Now the night wore and the morning came; and Face-of-god was abroad very early in the morning, as his custom was; and he washed the night from off him in the Carles' Bath of the Shivering Flood, and then went round through the encampment of the host, and saw none stirring save here and there the last watchmen of the night. He spake with one or two of these, and then went up to the head of the Vale, where was the pass that led to Silverdale; and there he saw the watch, and spake with them, and they told him that none had as yet come forth from the pass, and he bade them to blow the horn of warning to rouse up the Host as soon as the messengers came thence. For forerunners had been sent up the pass, and had been set to hold watch at divers places therein to pass on the word from place to place.

Thence went Face-of-god back toward the Hall; but when he was yet some way from it, he saw a slender glittering warrior come forth from the door thereof, who stood for a moment looking round about, and then came lightly and swiftly toward him; and lo! it was the Sun-beam, with a long hauberk over her kirtle falling below her knees, a helm on her head and plated shoes on her feet. She came up to him, and laid her hand to his cheek and the golden locks of his head (for he was bare-headed), and said to him, smiling:

"Gold-mane! thou badest me bear arms, and Folk-might also constrained me thereto. Lo thou!"

Said Face-of-god: "Folk-might is wise then, even as I am; and forsooth as thou art. For bethink thee if the bow drawn at a venture should speed the eyeless shaft against thy breast, and send me forth a wanderer from my Folk! For how could I bear the sight of the fair Dale, and no hope to see thee again therein?"

She said: "The heart is light within me to-day. Deemest thou that this is strange? Or dost thou call to mind that which thou spakest the other day, that it was of no avail to stand in the Doom-ring of the Folk and bear witness against ourselves? This will I not. This is no light-mindedness that thou beholdest in me, but the valiancy that the Fathers have set in mine heart. Deem not, O Gold-mane, fear not, that we shall die before they dight the bride-bed for us."

He would have kissed her mouth, but she put him away with her hand, and doffed her helm and laid it on the grass, and said:

"This is not the last time that thou shalt kiss me, Gold-mane, my dear; and yet I long for it as if it were, so high as the Fathers have raised me up this morn above fear and sadness."

He said nought, but drew her to him, and wonder so moved him, that he looked long and closely at her face before he kissed her; and forsooth he could find no blemish in it: it was as if it were but new come from the smithy of the Gods, and exceeding longing took hold of him. But even as their lips met, from the head of the Vale came the voice of the great horn; and it was answered straightway by the watchers all down the tents; and presently arose the shouts of men and the clash of weapons as folk armed themselves, and laughter therewith, for most men were battle-merry, and the cries of women shrilly-clear as they hastened about, busy over the morning meal before the departure of the Host. But Face-of-god said softly, still caressing the Sun-beam, and she him:

"Thus then we depart from this Valley of the Shadows, but as thou saidst when first we met therein, there shall be no sundering of thee and me, but thou shalt go down with me to the battle."

And he led her by the hand into the Hall of the Wolf,

and there they ate a morsel, and thereafter Face-of-god tarried not, but busied himself along with Folk-might and the other chieftains in arraying the Host for departure.

CHAPTER XLI

THE HOST DEPARTETH FROM SHADOWY VALE: THE FIRST DAY'S JOURNEY

It was about three hours before noon that the Host began to enter into the pass out of Shadowy Vale by the river-side; and the women and children, and men unfightworthy, stood on the higher ground at the foot of the cliffs to see the Host wend on the way. Of these a many were of the Woodlanders, who were now one folk with them of Shadowy Vale. And all these had chosen to abide tidings in the Vale, deeming that there was little danger therein, since that last slaughter which Folk-might had made of the Dusky Men; albeit Face-of-god had offered to send them all to Burgstead with two score and ten men-at-arms to guard them by the way and to eke out the warders of the Burg.

Now the fighting-men of Shadowy Vale were two long hundreds lacking five; of whom two score and ten were women, and three score and ten lads under twenty winters; but the women, though you might scarce see fairer of face and body, were doughty in arms, all good shooters in the bow; and the swains were eager and light-foot, cragsmen of the best, wont to scaling the cliffs of the Vale in search of the nests of gerfalcons and such-like fowl, and swimming the strong streams of the Shivering Flood; tough bodies and wiry, stronger than most grown men, and as fearless as the best.

The order of the Departure of the Host was this:

The Woodlanders went first into the pass, and with them were two score of the ripe Warriors of the Wolf. Then came of the kindreds of Burgdale, the Men of the Steer, the Bridge, and the Bull; then the Men of the Vine and the Sickle; then the Shepherd-folk; and lastly, the Men of the Face led by Stone-face and Hall-face. With these went another two score of the dwellers in Shadowy Vale, and the rest were scattered up and down the bands of the Host to guide them into the best paths and to make the way easier to them. Face-of-god was sundered from his kindred, and went along with Folk-might in the forefront of the Host, while his father the Alderman went as a simple man-at-arms with his House in the rearward. The Sun-beam followed her brother and Face-of-god amidst the Warriors of the Wolf, and with her were Bow-may clad in the Alderman's gift, and Wood-father and his children. Bow-may had caused her to doff her hauberk for that day, whereon they looked to fall in with no foeman. As for the Bride, she went with her kindred in all her war-gear; and the morning sun shone in the gems of her apparel, and her jewelled feet fell like flowers upon the deep grass of the upper Vale, and shone strange and bright amongst the black stones of the pass. She bore a quiver at her back and a shining yew bow in her hand, and went amongst the bowmen, for she was a very deft archer.

So fared they into the pass, leaving peace behind them, with all their banners displayed, and the banner of the Red-mouthed Wolf went with the Wolf and the Sun-burst in the forefront of their battle next after the two captains.

As for their road, the grassy space between the rock-

wall and the water was wide and smooth at first, and the cliffs rose up like bundles of spear-shafts high and clear from the green grass with no confused litter of fallen stones; so that the men strode on briskly, their hearts high-raised and full of hope. And as they went, the sweetness of song stirred in their souls, and at last Bow-may fell to singing in a loud clear voice, and her cousin Wood-wise answered her, and all the warriors of the Wolf who were in their band fell into the song at the ending, and the sound of their melody went down the water and reached the ears of those that were entering the pass, and of those who were abiding till the way should be clear of them: and this is some of what they sang:

BOW-MAY SINGETH:

Hear ye never a voice come crying
   Out from the waste where the winds fare wide?
"Sons of the Wolf, the days are dying,
   And where in the clefts of the rocks do ye hide?

"Into your hands hath the Sword been given,
   Hard are the palms with the kiss of the hilt;
Through the trackless waste hath the road been riven
   For the blade to seek to the heart of the guilt.

"And yet ye bide and yet ye tarry;
   Dear deem ye the sleep 'twixt hearth and board,
And sweet the maiden mouths ye marry,
   And bright the blade of the bloodless sword."

WOOD-WISE SINGETH:

Yea, here we dwell in the arms of our Mother
   The Shadowy Queen, and the hope of the Waste;
Here first we came, when never another
   Adown the rocky stair made haste.

Far is the foe, and no sword beholdeth
  What deed we work and whither we wend;
Dear are the days, and the Year enfoldeth
  The love of our life from end to end.

Voice of our Fathers, why will ye move us,
  And call up the sun our swords to behold?
Why will ye cry on the foeman to prove us?
  Why will ye stir up the heart of the bold?

BOW-MAY SINGETH:

Purblind am I, the voice of the chiding:
  Then tell me what is the thing ye bear?
What is the gift that your hands are hiding,
  The gold-adorned, the dread and dear?

WOOD-WISE SINGETH:

Dark in the sheath lies the Anvil's Brother,
  Hid is the hammered Death of Men.
Would ye look on the gift of the green-clad Mother?
  How then shall ye ask for a gift again?

THE WARRIORS SING:

Show we the Sunlight the Gift of the Mother,
  As foot follows foot to the foeman's den!
Gleam Sun, breathe Wind, on the Anvil's Brother,
  For bare is the hammered Death of Men.

Therewith they shook their naked swords in the air, and fared on eagerly, and as swiftly as the pass would have them fare. But so it was, that when the rear-ward of the Host was entering the first of the pass, and was going on the wide smooth sward, the van-ward was gotten to where there was but a narrow space clear betwixt water and cliff; for otherwhere was a litter of great rocks and small, hard to be threaded even by those who knew the passes well; so that men

had to tread along the very verge of the Shivering Flood, and wary must they be, for the water ran swift and deep betwixt banks of sheer rock half a fathom below their very foot-soles, which had but bare space to go on the narrow way. So it held on for a while, and then got safer, and there was more space for going betwixt cliff and flood; albeit it was toilsome enough, since for some way yet there was a drift of stones to cumber their feet, some big and some little, and some very big. After a while the way grew better, though here and there, where the cliffs lowered, were wide screes of loose stones that they must needs climb up and down. Thereafter for a space was there an end of the stony cumber, but the way betwixt the river and the cliffs narrowed again, and the black crags grew higher, and at last so exceeding high, and the way so narrow, that the sky overhead was to them as though they were at the bottom of a well, and men deemed that thence they could see the stars at noontide. For some time withal had the way been mounting up and up, though the cliffs grew higher over it; till at last they were but going on a narrow shelf, the Shivering Flood swirling and rattling far below them betwixt sheer rock-walls grown exceeding high; and above them the cliffs going up towards the heavens as black as a moonless starless night of winter. And as the flood thundered below, so above them roared the ceaseless thunder of the wind of the pass, that blew exceeding fierce down that strait place; so that the skirts of their garments were wrapped about their knees by it, and their feet were well-nigh stayed at whiles as they breasted the push thereof.

But as they mounted higher and higher yet, the noise of the waters swelled into a huge roar that drowned the bellowing of the prisoned wind, and down the pass came drifting a fine rain that fell not

from the sky, for between the clouds of that drift could folk see the heavens bright and blue above them. This rain was but the spray of the great force up to whose steps they were climbing.

Now the way got rougher as they mounted; but this toil was caused by their gain; for the rock-wall, which thrust out a buttress there as if it would have gone to the very edge of the gap wherethrough the flood ran, and so have cut the way off utterly, was here somewhat broken down, and its stones scattered down the steep bent, so that there was a passage, though a toilsome one.

Thus then through the wind-borne drift of the great force, through which men could see the white waters tossing down below, amidst the clattering thunder of the Shivering Flood and the rumble of the wind of the gap, that tore through their garments and hair as if it would rend all to rags and bear it away, the banners of the Wolf won their way to the crest of the midmost height of the pass, and the long line of the Host came clambering after them; and each band of warriors as it reached the top cast an unheard shout from amidst the tangled fury of wind and waters.

A little further on and all that turmoil was behind them; the sun, now grown low, smote the wavering column of spray from the force at their backs, till the rainbows lay bright across it; and the sunshine lay wide over a little valley that sloped somewhat steeply to the west right up from the edge of the river; and beyond these western slopes could men see a low peak spreading down on all sides to the plain, till it was like to a bossed shield, and the name of it was Shield-broad. Dark grey was the valley everywhere, save that by the side of the water was a space of bright green-sward hedged about toward the mountain by a wall of rocks tossed up into wild shapes of spires and jagged

points. The river itself was spread out wide and shallow, and went rattling about great grey rocks scattered here and there amidst it, till it gathered itself together to tumble headlong over three slant steps into the mighty gap below.

From the height in the pass those grey slopes seemed easy to traverse; but the warriors of the Wolf knew that it was far otherwise, for they were but the molten rock-sea that in time long past had flowed forth from Shield-broad and filled up the whole valley endlong and overthwart, cooling as it flowed, and the tumbled hedge of rock round about the green plain by the river was where the said rock-sea had been stayed by meeting with soft ground, and had heaped itself up round about the green-sward. And that great rock-flood as it cooled split in divers fashions; and the rain and weather had been busy on it for ages, so that it was worn into a maze of narrow paths, most of which, after a little, brought the wayfarer to a dead stop, or else led him back again to the place whence he had started; so that only those who knew the passes throughly could thread that maze without immeasurable labour.

Now when the men of the Host looked from the high place whereon they stood toward the green plain by the river, they saw on the top of that rock-wall a red pennon waving on a spear, and beside it three or four weaponed men gleaming bright in the evening sun; and they waved their swords to the Host, and made lightning of the sunbeams, and the men of the Host waved swords to them in turn. For these were the outguards of the Host; and the place whereon they were was at whiles dwelt in by those who would drive the spoil in Silverdale, and midmost of the green-sward was a booth builded of rough stones and turf, a refuge for a score of men in rough weather.

So the men of the vanward gat them down the hill, and made the best of their way toward the grassy plain through that rocky maze which had once been as a lake of molten glass; and as short as the way looked from above, it was two hours or ever they came out of it on to the smooth turf, and it was moonlight and night ere the House of the Face had gotten on to the green-sward.

There then the Host abode for that night, and after they had eaten lay down on the green grass and slept as they might. Bow-may would have brought the Sun-beam into the booth with some others of the women, but she would not enter it, because she deemed that otherwise the Bride would abide without; and the Bride, when she came up, along with the House of the Steer, beheld the Sun-beam, that Wood-father's children had made a lair for her without like a hare's form; and forsooth many a time had she lain under the naked heaven in Shadowy Vale and the waste about it, even as the Bride had in the meadows of Burgdale. So when the Bride was bidden thereto, she went meekly into the booth, and lay there with others of the damsels-at-arms.

CHAPTER XLII

THE HOST COMETH TO THE EDGES OF SILVERDALE

So wore the night, and when the dawn was come were the two captains afoot, and they went from band to band to see that all was ready, and all men were astir betimes, and by the time that the sun smote the eastern side of Shield-broad ruddy, they had broken their fast and were dight for departure. Then the horns blew up beside the banners and rejoiced the

hearts of men. But by the command of the captains this was the last time that they should sound till they blew for onset in Silverdale, because now would they be drawing nigher and nigher to the foemen, and they wotted not but that wandering bands of them might be hard on the lips of the pass, and might hear the horns' voice, and turn to see what was toward.

Forth then went the banners of the Wolf, and the men of the vanward fell to threading the rock-maze toward the north, and in two hours' time were clear of the Dale under Shield-broad. All went in the same order as yesterday; but on this day the Sun-beam would bear her hauberk, and had a sword girt to her side, and her heart was high and her speech merry.

When they left the Dale under Shield-broad the way was easy and wide for a good way, the river flowing betwixt low banks, and the pass being more like a string of little valleys than a mere gap, as it had been on the other side of the Dale. But when one third of the day was past, the way began to narrow on them again, and to rise up little by little; and at last the rock-walls drew close to the river, and when men looked toward the north they saw no way, and nought but a wall. For the gap of the Shivering Flood turned now to the east, and the Flood came down from the east in many falls, as it were over a fearful stair, through a gap where there was no path between the cliffs and the water, nought but the boiling flood and its turmoil; so that they who knew not the road wondered what they should do.

But Folk-might led the banners to where a great buttress of the cliffs thrust itself into the way, coming well-nigh down to the water, just at the corner where the river turned eastward, and they got them about it as they might, and on the other side thereof lo! another gap exceeding strait, scarce twenty foot over,

wall-sided, rugged beyond measure, going up steeply from the great valley: a little water ran through it, mostly filling up the floor of it from side to side; but it was but shallow. This was now the battle-road of the Host, and the vanward entered it at once, turning their backs upon the Shivering Flood.

Full toilsome and dreary was that strait way; often great stones hung above their heads, bridging the gap and hiding the sky from them; nor was there any path for them save the stream itself; so that whiles were they wading its waters to the knee or higher, and whiles were they striding from stone to stone amidst the rattle of the waters, and whiles were they stepping warily along the ledges of rock above the deeper pools, and in all wise labouring in overcoming the rugged road amidst the twilight of the gap.

Thus they toiled till the afternoon was well worn, and so at last they came to where the rock-wall was somewhat broken down on the north side, and great rocks had fallen across the gap, and dammed up the waters, which fell scantily over the dam from stone to stone into a pool at the bottom of it. Up this breach, then, below the force they scrambled and struggled, for rough indeed was the road for them; and so came they up out of the gap on to the open hill-side, a great shoulder of the heath sloping down from the north, and littered over with big stones, borne thither belike by some ice-river of the earlier days; and one great rock was in special as great as the hall of a wealthy goodman, and shapen like to a hall with hipped gables, which same the men of the Wolf called House-stone.

There then the noise and clatter of the vanward rose up on the face of the heath, and men were exceeding joyous that they had come so far without mishap. Therewith came weaponed men out from under House-stone, and they came toward the men of the vanward,

and they were a half-score of the forerunners of the Wolf; therefore Folk-might and Face-of-god fell at once into speech with them, and had their tidings; and when they had heard them, they saw nought to hinder the host from going on their road to Silverdale forthright; and there were still three hours of daylight before them. So the vanward of the host tarried not, and the captains left word with the men from under House-stone that the rest of the Host should fare on after them speedily, and that they should give this word to each company, as men came up from out the gap. Then they fared speedily up the hill-side, and in an hour's wearing had come to the crest thereof, and to where the ground fell steadily toward the north, and hereabout the scattered stones ceased, and on the other side of the crest the heath began to be soft and boggy, and at last so soft, that if they had not been wisely led, they had been bemired oftentimes. At last they came to where the flows that trickled through the mires drew together into a stream, so that men could see it running; and thereon some of the Woodlanders cried out joyously that the waters were running north; and then all knew that they were drawing nigh to Silverdale.

No man they met on the road, nor did they of Shadowy Vale look to meet any; because the Dusky Men were not great hunters for the more part, except it were of men, and especially of women; and, moreover, these hill-slopes of the mountain-necks led nowhither and were utterly waste and dreary, and there was nought to be seen there but snipes and bitterns and whimbrel and plover, and here and there a hill-fox, or the great erne hanging over the heath on his way to the mountain.

When sunset came, they were getting clear of the miry ground, and the stream which they had come across amidst of the mires had got clearer and greater,

and rattled down between wide stony sides over the heath; and here and there it deepened as it cleft its way through little knolls that rose out of the face of the mountain-neck. As the Host climbed one of these and was come to its topmost (it was low enough not to turn the stream), Face-of-god looked and beheld dark-blue mountains rising up far off before him, and higher than these, but away to the east, the snowy peaks of the World-mountains. Then he called to mind what he had seen from the Burg of the Runaways, and he took Folk-might by the arm, and pointed toward those far-off mountains.

"Yea," said Folk-might, "so it is, War-leader. Silverdale lieth between us and yonder blue ridges, and it is far nigher to us than to them."

But the Sun-beam came close to those twain, and took Face-of-god by the hand and said: "O Gold-mane, dost thou see?" and he turned about and beheld her, and saw how her cheeks flamed and her eyes glittered, and he said in a low voice: "To-morrow for mirth or silence, for life or death."

But the whole vanward as they came up stayed to behold the sight of the mountains on the other side of Silverdale, and the banners of the Folk hung over their heads, moving but little in the soft air of the evening: so went they on their ways.

The sun sank, and the dusk came on them as they followed down the stream, and night came, and was clear and starlit, though the moon was not yet risen. Now was the ground firm and the grass sweet and flowery, and wind-worn bushes were scattered round about them, as they began to go down into the ghyll that cleft the wall of Silverdale, and the night-wind blew in their faces from the very Dale and place of the Battle to be. The path down was steep at first, but the ghyll was wide, and the sides of it no longer straight

walls, as in the gaps of their earlier journey, but broken, sloping back, and (as they might see on the morrow) partly of big stones and shaly grit, partly grown over with bushes and rough grass, with here and there a little stream trickling down their sides. As they went, the ghyll widened out, till at last they were in a valley going down to the plain, in places steep, in places flat and smooth, the stream ever rattling down the midst of it, and they on the west side thereof. The vale was well grassed, and oak-trees and ash and holly and hazel grew here and there about it; and at last the Host had before it a wood which filled the vale from side to side, not much tangled with undergrowth, and quite clear of it nigh to the stream-side. Thereinto the vanward entered, but went no long way ere the leaders called a halt and bade pitch the banners, for that there should they abide the daylight. Thus it had been determined at the Council of the Hall of the Wolf; for Folk-might had said: "With an Host as great as ours, and mostly of men come into a land of which they know nought at all, an onslaught by night is perilous: yea, and our foes should be over-much scattered, and we should have to wander about seeking them. Let us rather abide in the wood of Wood-dale till the morning, and then display our banners on the hill-side above Silverdale, so that they may gather together to fall upon us: in no case shall they keep us out of the Dale."

There then they stayed, and as each company came up to the wood, they were marshalled into their due places, so that they might set the battle in array on the edge of Silverdale.

CHAPTER XLIII

FACE-OF-GOD LOOKETH ON SILVERDALE: THE BOWMEN'S BATTLE

THERE then they rested, as folk wearied with the toilsome journey, when they had set sure watches round about their campment; and they ate quietly what meat they had with them, and so gat them to sleep in the wood on the eve of battle.

But not all slept; for the two captains went about amongst the companies, Folk-might to the east, Face-of-god to the west, to look to the watches, and to see that all was ordered duly. Also the Sun-beam slept not, but she lay beside Bow-may at the foot of an oak-tree; she watched Face-of-god as he went away amidst the men of the Host, and watched and waked abiding his returning footsteps.

The night was well worn by then he came back to his place in the vanward, and on his way back he passed through the folk of the Steer laid along on the grass, all save those of the watch, and the light of the moon high aloft was mingled with the light of the earliest dawn; and as it happed he looked down, and lo! close to his feet the face of the Bride as she lay beside her grand-sire, her head pilowed on a bundle of bracken. She was sleeping soundly like a child who has been playing all day, and whose sleep has come to him unsought and happily. Her hands were laid together by her side; her cheek was as fair and clear as it was wont to be at her best; her face looked calm and happy, and a lock of her dark-red hair strayed from her uncovered head over her breast and lay across her wrists, so peacefully she slept.

Face-of-god turned his eyes from her at once, and went by swiftly, and came to his own company. The Sun-beam saw him coming, and rose straightway to her feet from beside Bow-may, who lay fast asleep, and she held out her hands to him; and he took them and kissed them, and he cast his arms about her and kissed her mouth and her face, and she his in like wise; and she said:

"O Gold-mane, if this were but the morrow of to-morrow! Yet shall all be well; shall it not?"

Her voice was low, but it waked Bow-may, who sat up at once broad awake, after the manner of a hunter of the waste ever ready for the next thing to betide, and moreover the Sun-beam had been in her thoughts these two days, and she feared for her, lest she should be slain or maimed. Now she smiled on the Sun-beam and said:

"What is it? Does thy mind forebode evil? That needeth not. I tell thee it is not so ill for us of the sword to be in Silverdale. Thrice have I been there since the Overthrow, and never more than a half-score in company, and yet am I whole to-day."

"Yea, sister," said Face-of-god, "but in past times ye did your deed and then fled away; but now we come to abide here, and this night is the last of lurking."

"Ah," she said, "a little way from this I saw such things that we had good will to abide here longer, few as we were, but that we feared to be taken alive."

"What things were these?" said Face-of-god.

"Nay," she said, "I will not tell thee now; but mayhap in the lighted winter feast-hall, when the kindred are so nigh us and about us that they seem to us as if they were all the world, I may tell it thee; or mayhap I never shall."

Said the Sun-beam, smiling: "Thou wilt ever be

talking, Bow-may. Now let the War-leader depart, for he will have much to do."

And she was well at ease that she had seen Face-of-god again; but he said:

"Nay, not so much; all is well-nigh done; in an hour it will be broad day, and two hours thereafter shall the Banner be displayed on the edge of Silver-dale."

The cheek of the Sun-beam flushed, and paled again, as she said: "Yea, we shall stand even as our Fathers stood on the day when, coming from off the waste, they beheld it, and knew it would be theirs. Ah me! how have I longed for this morn. But now—Tell me, Gold-mane, dost thou deem that I am afraid? And I whom thou hast deemed to be a God."

Quoth Bow-may: "Thou shalt deem her twice a God ere noontide, brother Gold-mane. But come now! the hour of deadly battle is at hand, and we may not laugh that away; and therefore I bid thee remember, Gold-mane, how thou didst promise to kiss me once more on the verge of deadly battle."

Therewith she stood up before him, and he tarried not, but kind and smiling took her face between his two hands and kissed her lips, and she cast her arms about him and kissed him, and then sank down on the grass again, and turned from him, and laid her face amongst the grass and the bracken, and they could see that she was weeping, and her body was shaken with sobs. But the Sun-beam knelt down to her, and caressed her with her hand, and spake kind words to her softly, while Face-of-god went his ways to meet Folk-might.

Now was the dawn fading into full daylight; and between dawn and sunrise were all men stirring; for the watch had waked the hundred-leaders, and they the leaders of scores and half-scores, and they the

whole folk; and they sat quietly in the wood and made no noise.

In the night the watch of the Sickle had fallen in with a thrall who had stolen up from the Dale to set gins for hares, and now in the early morning they brought him to the War-leader. He was even such a man as those with whom Face-of-god had fallen in before, neither better nor worse than most of them: he was sore afraid at first, but by then he was come to the captains he understood that he had happened upon friends; but he was dull of comprehension and slow of speech. Albeit Folk-might gathered from him that the Dusky Men had some inkling of the onslaught; for he said that they had been gathering together in the market-place of Silver-stead, and would do so again soon. Moreover, the captains deemed from his speech that those new tribes had come to hand sooner than was looked for, and were even now in the Dale. Folk-might smiled as one who is not best pleased when he heard these tidings; but Face-of-god was glad to hear thereof; for what he loathed most was that the war should drag out in hunting of scattered bands of the foe. Herewith came Dallach to them as they talked (for Face-of-god had sent for him), and he fell to questioning the man further; by whose answers it seemed that many men also had come into the Dale from Rosedale, so that they of the kindreds were like to have their hands full. Lastly Dallach drew from the thrall that it was on that very morning that the great Folk-mote of the Dusky Men should be holden in the market-place of the Stead, which was right great, and about it were the biggest of the houses wherein the men of the kindred had once dwelt.

So when they had made an end of questioning the thrall, and had given him meat and drink, they asked him if he would take weapons in his hand and lead

them on the ways into the Dale, bidding him look about the wood and note how great and mighty an host they were. And the carle yeasaid this, after staring about him a while, and they gave him spear and shield, and he went with the vanward as a way-leader.

Again presently came a watch of the Shepherds, and they had found a man and a woman dead and stark naked hanging to the boughs of a great oak-tree deep in the wood. This men knew for some vengeance of the Dusky Men, for it was clear to see that these poor people had been sorely tormented before they were slain. Also the same watch had stumbled on the dead body of an old woman, clad in rags, lying amongst the rank grass about a little flow; she was exceeding lean and hunger-starved, and in her hand was a frog which she had half eaten. And Dallach, when he heard of this, said that it was the wont of the Dusky Men to slay their thralls when they were past work, or to drive them into the wilderness to die.

Lastly came a watch from the men of the Face, having with them two more thralls, lusty young men; these they had come upon in company of their master, who had brought them up into the wood to shoot him a buck, and therefore they bare bows and arrows. The watch had slain the master straightway while the thralls stood looking on. They were much afraid of the weaponed men, but answered to the questioning much readier than the first man; for they were household thralls, and better fed and clad than he, who was but a toiler in the fields. They yeasaid all his tale, and said moreover that the Folk-mote of the Dusky Men should be holden in the market-place that forenoon, and that most of the warriors should be there, both the new-comers and the Rosedale lords, and that without doubt they should be under arms.

To these men also they gave a good sword and a

helm each, and bade them be brisk with their bows, and they said yea to marching with the Host ; and indeed they feared nothing so much as being left behind ; for if they fell into the hands of the Dusky Men, and their master missing, they should first be questioned with torments, and then slain in the evillest manner.

Now whereas things had thus betid, and that they knew thus much of their foemen, Face-of-god called all the chieftains together, and they sat on the green grass and held counsel amongst them, and to one and all it seemed good that they should suffer the Dusky Men to gather together before they meddled with them, and then fall upon them in such order and such time as should seem good to the captains watching how things went ; and this would be easy, whereas they were all lying in the wood in the same order as they would stand in battle-array if they were all drawn up together on the brow of the hill. Albeit Face-of-god deemed it good, after he had heard all that they who had been in the Stead could tell him thereof, that the Shepherd-Folk, who were more than three long hundreds, and they of the Steer, the Bridge, and the Bull, four hundreds in all, should take their places eastward of the Woodlanders who had led the vanward.

Straightway the word was borne to these men, and the shift was made : so that presently the Woodlanders were amidmost of the Host, and had with them on their right hands the Men of the Steer, the Bridge, and the Bull, and beyond them the Shepherd-Folk. But on their left hand lay the Men of the Vine, then they of the Sickle, and lastly the Men of the Face, and these three kindreds were over five hundreds of warriors : as for the Men of the Wolf, they abode at first with those companies which they had led through the wastes, though this was changed afterwards.

All this being done, Face-of-god gave out that all men should break their fast in peace and leisure; and while men were at their meat, Folk-might spake to Face-of-god and said: "Come, brother, for I would show thee a goodly thing; and thou, Dallach, come with us."

Then he brought them by paths in the wood till Face-of-god saw the sky shine white between the tree-boles, and in a little while they were come well-nigh out of the thicket, and then they went warily; for before them was nought but the slopes of Wood-dale, going down steeply into Silverdale, with nought to hinder the sight of it, save here and there bushes or scattered trees; and so fair and lovely it was that Face-of-god could scarce forbear to cry out. He saw that it was only at the upper or eastern end, where the mountains of the Waste went round about it, that the Dale was narrow; it soon widened out toward the west, and for the most part was encompassed by no such straight-sided a wall as was Burgdale, but by sloping hills and bents, mostly indeed somewhat higher and steeper than the pass wherein they were, but such as men could well climb if they had a mind to, and there were any end to their journey. The Dale went due west a good way, and then winded about to the south-west, and so was hidden from them thereaway by the bents that lay on their left hand. As it was wider, so it was not so plain a ground as was Burgdale, but rose in knolls and little hills here and there. A river greater than the Weltering Water wound about amongst the said mounds; and along the side of it out in the open dale were many goodly houses and homesteads of stone. The knolls were mostly covered over with vines, and there were goodly and great trees in groves and clumps, chiefly oak and sweet chestnut and linden; many were the orchards, now in blossom, about the home-

steads; the pastures of the neat and horses spread out bright green up from the water-side, and deeper green showed the acres of the wheat on the lower slopes of the knolls, and in wide fields away from the river.

Just below the pitch of the hill whereon they were, lay Silver-stead, the town of the Dale. Hitherto it had been an unfenced place; but Folk-might pointed to where on the western side a new white wall was rising, and on which, young as the day yet was, men were busy laying the stones and spreading the mortar. Fair seemed that town to Face-of-god: the houses were all builded of stone, and some of the biggest were roofed with lead, which also as well as silver was dug out of the mountains at the eastern end of the Dale. The market-place was clear to see from where they stood, though there were houses on all sides of it, so wide it was. From their standing-place it was but three furlongs to this heart of Silverdale; and Face-of-god could see brightly-clad men moving about in it already. High above their heads he beheld two great clots of scarlet and yellow raised on poles and pitched in front of a great stone-built hall roofed with lead, which stood amidmost of the west end of the Place, and betwixt those poles he saw on a mound with long slopes at its sides somewhat of white stone, and amidmost of the whole Place a great sack of faggot-wood built up four-square. Those red and yellow things on the poles he deemed would be the banners of the murder-carles; and Folk-might told him that even so it was, and that they were but big bunches of strips of woollen cloth, much like to great rag-mops, save that the rags were larger and longer: no other token of war, said Folk-might, did those folk carry, save a crook-bladed sword, smeared with man's blood, and bigger than any man might wield in battle.

"Art thou far-seeing, War-leader?" quoth he. "What canst thou see in the market-place?"

Said Face-of-god: "Far-seeing am I above most men, and I see in the Place a man in scarlet standing by the banner, which is pitched in front of the great stone hall, near to the mound with the white stone on it; and meseemeth he beareth a great horn in his hand."

Said Folk-might: "Yea, and that stone hall was our Mote-house when we were lords of the Dale, and thence it was that they who are now thralls of the Dusky Men sent to them their message and token of yielding. And as for that white stone, it is the altar of their god; for they have but one, and he is that same crook-bladed sword. And now that I look, I see a great stack of wood amidmost the market-place, and well I know what that betokeneth."

"Lo you!" said Face-of-god, "the man with the horn is gone up on to the altar-mound, and meseemeth he is setting the little end of the horn to his mouth."

"Hearken then!" said Folk-might. And in a moment came the hoarse tuneless sound of the horn down the wind towards them; and Folk-might said:

"I deem I should know what that blast meaneth; and now is it time that the Host drew nigher to set them in array behind these very trees. But if ye will, War-leader, we will abide here and watch the ways of the foemen, and send Dallach with the word to the Host; also I would have thee suffer me to bid hither at once two score and ten of the best of the bowmen of our folk and the Woodlanders, and Wood-wise to lead them, for he knoweth well the land hereabout, and what is good to do."

"It is good," said Face-of-god. "Be speedy, Dallach!"

So Dallach departed, running lightly, and the two

chiefs abode there; and the horn in Silver-stead blew at whiles for a little, and then stayed; and Folk-might said:

"Lo you! they come flockmeal to the Mote-stead; the Place will be filled ere long."

Said Face-of-god: "Will they make offerings to their god at the hallowing-in of their Folk-mote? Where then are the slaughter-beasts?"

"They shall not long be lacking," said Folk-might. "See you it is getting thronged about the altar and the Mote-house."

Now there were four ways into the Market-place of Silver-stead turned toward the four airts, and the midmost of the kindreds' battle looked right down the southern one, which went up to the wood, but stopped there in a mere woodland path, and the more part of the town lay north and west of this way, albeit there was a way from the east also. But the hill-side just below the two captains lay two furlongs west of this southern way; and it went down softly till it was gotten quite near to the backs of the houses on the south side of the Market-place, and was sprinkled scantly with bushes and trees as aforesaid; but at last were there more bushes, which well-nigh made a hedge across it, reaching from the side of the southern way; and a foot or two beyond these bushes the ground fell by a steep and broken bent down to the level of the Market-place, and bewixt that fringe of bushes and the backs of the houses on the south side of the Place was less it maybe than a full furlong: but the southern road aforesaid went down softly into the Market-place, since it had been fashioned so by men.

Now the two chiefs heard a loud blast of horns come up from the town, and lo! a great crowd of men wending their ways down the road from the north, and they came into the Market-place with spears and

other weapons tossing in the air, and amidst of these men, who seemed to be all of the warriors, they saw as they drew nigher some two score and ten of men clad in long raiment of yellow and scarlet, with tall spiring hats of strange fashion on their heads, and in their hands long staves with great blades like scythes done on to them; and again, in the midst of these yellow and red glaive-bearers, in the very heart of the throng, were some score of naked folk, they deemed both men and women, but were not sure, so close was the throng; nor could they see if they were utterly naked.

"Lo you, brother!" quoth Folk-might, "said I not that the beasts for the hewing should not tarry? Yonder naked folk are even they: and ye may well deem that they are the thralls of the Dusky Men; and meseemeth by the whiteness of their skins they be of the best of them. For these felons, it is like, look to winning great plenty of thralls in Burgdale, and so set the less store on them they have, and may expend them freely."

As he spake they heard the sound of men marching in the wood behind them, and they turned about and saw that there was come Wood-wise, and with him upwards of two score and ten of the bowmen of the Woodlanders and the Wolf—huntsmen, cragsmen, and scourers of the Waste; men who could shoot the chaffinch on the twig a hundred yards aloof; who could make a hiding-place of the bennets of the way-side grass, or the stem of the slender birch-tree. With these must needs be Bow-may, who was the closest shooter of all the kindreds.

So then Wood-wise told the War-leader that Dallach had given the word to the Host, and that all men were astir and would be there presently in their ordered companies; and Face-of-god spake to Folk-might, and

said: "Chief of the Wolf, wilt thou not give command to these bowmen, and set them to the work; for thou wottest thereof."

"Yea, that will I," said Folk-might, and turned to Wood-wise, and said: "Wood-wise, get ye down the slope, and loose on these felons, who have a murder on hand, if so be ye have a chance to do it wisely. But in any case come ye all back; for all shall be needed yet to-day. So flee if they pursue, for ye shall have us to flee to. Now be ye wary, nor let the curse of the Wolf and the Face lie on your slothfulness."

Wood-wise did but nod his head and lift his hand to his fellows, who set off after him down the slope without more tarrying. They went very warily, as if they were hunting a quarry which would flee from them; and they crept amongst the grass and stones from bush to bush like serpents, and so, unseen by the Dusky Men, who indeed were busied over their own matters, they came to the fringe of bushes above the broken ground aforesaid, and there they took their stand, and before them below those steep banks was but the space at the back of the houses. As to the houses, as aforesaid, they were not so high as elsewhere about the Market-place; and at the end of a long low hall there was a gap between its gable and the next house, whereby they had a clear sight of the Place about the god's altar and the banners, and the great hall of Silverdale, with the double stair that went up to the door thereof.

There then they made them ready, and Wood-wise set men to watch that none should come sidelong on them unawares; their bows were bent and their quivers open, and they were eager for the fray.

Thus they beheld the Market-place from their cover, and saw that those folk who were to be hewn to the god were now standing facing the altar in a half-ring,

and behind them in another half-ring the glaive-bearers who had brought them thither stood glaive in hand ready to hew them down when the token should be given; and these were indeed the priests of the god.

There was clear space round about these poor slaughter-thralls, so that the bowmen could see them well, and they told up a score of them, half men, half women, and they were all stark naked save for wreaths of flowers about their middles and their necks; and they had shackles of lead about their wrists; which same lead should be taken out of the fire wherein they should be burned, and from the shape it should take after it had passed through the fire would the priests foretell the luck of the deed to be done.

It was clear to be seen from thence that Folk-might was right when he said that these slaughter-thralls were of the best of the house-thralls and bed-mates of the Dusky Men, and that these felons were open-handed to their god, and would not cheat him, or withhold from him the best and most delicate of all they had.

Now spake Wood-wise to those about him: "It is sure that Folk-might would have us give these poor thralls a chance, and that we must loose upon the felons who would hew them down; and if we are to come back again, we can go no nigher. What sayest thou, Bow-may? Is it nigh enough? Can aught be done?"

"Yea, yea," she said, "nigh enough it is; but let Gold-ring be with me and half a score of the very best, whether they be of our folk or the Woodlanders, men who cannot miss such a mark; and when we have loosed, then let all loose, and stay not till our shot be spent. Haste, now haste! time presseth; for if the Host showeth on the brow of the hill, these felons will hew down their slaughter-beasts before they turn on

their foemen. Let the grey-goose wing speed trouble and confusion amongst them."

But ere she had done her words Wood-wise had got to speaking quietly with the Woodlanders; and Bears-bane, who was amidst them, chose out eight of the best of his folk, men who doubted nothing of hitting whatever they could see in the Market-place; and they took their stand for shooting, and with them besides Bow-may were two women and four men of the Wolf, and Gold-ring withal, a carle of fifty winters, long, lean, and wiry, a fell shooter if ever anyone were.

So all these notched their shafts and laid them on the yew, and each had between the two last fingers of the shaft-hand another shaft ready, and a half score more stuck into the ground before him.

Now giveth Wood-wise the word to these sixteen as to which of the Felons with the glaives they shall each one aim at; and he saith withal in a soft voice: "Help cometh from the Hill; soon shall battle be joined in Silverdale."

Thus stand they watching Bow-may and Gold-ring till they draw home the notches; and amidst their waiting the glaive-bearing Felons fall a-singing a harsh and ugly hymn to their crooked-sword god, and the Market-stead is thronged endlong and overthwart with the tribes of the Dusky Men.

There now standeth Bow-may far-sighted and keen-eyed, her face as pale as a linen sleeve, an awful smile on her glittering eyes and close-set lips, and she feeling the twisted string of the red yew and the polished sides of the notch, while the yelling song of the Dusky priests quavers now and ends with a wild shrill cry, and she noteth the midmost of the priests beginning to handle his weapon: then swift and steady she draweth home the notches, while the yew bow standeth still as the oak-bole ere the summer storm ariseth,

and the twang of the sixteen strings maketh but one fell sound as the feathered bane of men goeth on its way.

There was silence for a moment of time in the Market of Silver-stead, as if the bolt of the Gods had fallen there; and then arose a huge wordless yell from those about the altar, and one of the priests who was left hove up his glaive two-handed to smite the naked slaughter-thralls; but or ever the stroke fell, Bow-may's second shaft was through his throat, and he rolled over amidst his dead fellows; and the other fifteen had loosed with her, and then even as they could Wood-wise and the others of their company; and all they notched and loosed without tarrying, and no shout, no word came from their lips, only the twanging strings spake for them; for they deemed the minutes that hurried by were worth much joy of their lives to be. And few indeed were the passing minutes ere the dead men lay in heaps about the Altar of the Crooked Sword, and the wounded men wallowed amidst them.

CHAPTER XLIV

OF THE ONSLAUGHT OF THE MEN OF THE STEER, THE BRIDGE, AND THE BULL

Wild was the turmoil and confusion in the Market-stead; for the more part of the men therein knew not what had befallen about the altar, though some clomb up to the top of that stack of faggots built for the burning of the thralls, and when they saw what was toward fell to yelling and cursing; and their fellows on the plain Place could not hear their story for the clamour, and they also fell to howling as if a wood full of wild dogs was there.

And still the shafts rained down on that throng from the Bent of the Bowmen, for another two score men of the Woodlanders had crept down the hill to them, and shafts failed them not. But the Dusky Men about the altar, for all their terror, or even maybe because of it, now began to turn upon the scarce-seen foemen, and to press up wildly toward the hill-side, though as it were without any order or aim. Every man of them had his weapons, and those no mere gilded toys, but their very tools of battle; and some, but no great number, had their bows with them and a few shafts; and these began to shoot at whatsoever they could see on the hill-side, but at first so wildly and hurriedly that they did no harm.

It must be said of them that at first only those about the altar fell on toward the hill; for those about the road that led southward knew not what had betided nor whither to turn. So that at this beginning of the battle, of all the thousands in the great Place it was but a few hundreds that set on the Bent of the Bowmen, and at these the bowmen of the kindreds shot so close and so wholly together that they fell one over another in the narrow ways between the houses whereby they must needs go to gather on the plain ground betwixt the backs of the houses and the break of the hill-side. But little by little the archers of the Dusky Men gathered behind the corpses of the slain, and fell to shooting at what they could see of the men of the kindreds, which at that while was not much, for as bold as they were, they fought like wary hunters of the Wood and the Waste.

But now at last throughout all that throng of Felons in the Market-place the tale began to spread of foemen come into the Dale and shooting from the Bents, and all they turned their faces to the hill, and

the whole set of the throng was thitherward ; though they fared but slowly, so evil was the order of them, each man hindering his neighbour as he went. And not only did the Dusky Men come flockmeal toward the Bent of the Bowmen, but also they jostled along toward the road that led southward. That beheld Wood-wise from the Bent, and he was minded to get him and his aback, now that they had made so great a slaughter of the foemen ; and two or three of his fellows had been hurt by arrows, and Bow-may, she would have been slain thrice over but for the hammer-work of the Alderman. And no marvel was that ; for now she stood on a little mound not half covered by a thin thorn-bush, and notched and loosed at whatever was most notable, as though she were shooting at the mark on a summer evening in Shadowy Vale. But as Wood-wise was at point to give the word to depart, from behind them rang out the merry sound of the Burgdale horns, and he turned to look at the wood-side, and lo! thereunder was the hill bright and dark with men-at-arms, and over them floated the Banners of the Wolf, and the Banners of the Steer, the Bridge, and the Bull. Then gave forth the bowmen of the kindreds their first shout, and they made no stay in their shooting ; but shot the eagerer, for they deemed that help would come without their turning about to draw it to them : and even so it was. For straightway down the bent came striding Face-of-god betwixt the two Banners of the Wolf, and beside him were Red-wolf the tall and War-grove, and therewithal Wood-wont and Wood-wicked, and many other men of the Wolf ; for now that the men of the kindreds had been brought face to face with the foe, and there was less need of them for way-leaders, the more part of them were liefer to fight under their own banner along with the Woodlanders ; so that the company of those who went

under the Wolves was more than three long hundreds and a half; and the bowmen on the edge of the bent shouted again and merrily, when they felt that their brothers were amongst them, and presently was the arrow-storm at its fiercest, and the twanging of bow-strings and the whistle of the shafts was as the wind among the clefts of the mountains; for all the new-comers were bowmen of the best.

But the kindreds of the Steer, the Bridge, and the Bull, they hung yet a while longer on the hill's brow, their banners floating over them and their horns blowing; and the Dusky Felons in the Market-place beheld them, and fear and rage at once filled their hearts, and a fierce and dreadful yell brake out from them, and joyously did the Men of Burgdale answer them, and song arose amongst them even such as this:

THE MEN OF THE BRIDGE SING:

Why stand ye together, why bear ye the shield,
Now the calf straineth tether at edge of the field?

Now the lamb bleateth stronger and waters run clear,
And the day groweth longer and glad is the year?

Now the mead-flowers jostle so thick as they stand,
And singeth the throstle all over the land?

THE MEN OF THE STEER SING:

No cloud the day darkened, no thunder we heard,
But the horns' speech we hearkened as men unafeared.

Yea, so merry it sounded, we turned from the Dale,
Where all wealth abounded, to wot of its tale.

THE MEN OF THE BRIDGE SING:

What white boles then bear ye, what wealth of the woods?
What chafferers hear ye bid loud for your goods?

THE MEN OF THE BULL SING:

O the bright beams we carry are stems of the steel;
Nor long shall we tarry across them to deal.

Hark the men of the cheaping, how loudly they cry
On the hook for the reaping of men doomed to die!

THEY ALL SING:

Heave spear up! fare forward, O Men of the Dale!
For the Warrior, our war-ward, shall hearken the tale.

Therewith they ceased a moment, and then gave a great and hearty shout all together, and all their horns blew, and they moved on down the hill as one man, slowly and with no jostling, the spearmen first, and then they of the axe and the sword; and on their flanks the deft archers loosed on the stumbling jostling throng of the Dusky Men, who for their part came on drifting and surging up the road to the hill.

But when those big spearmen of the Dale had gone a little way the horns' voice died out, and their great-staved spears rose up from their shoulders into the air, and stood so a moment, and then slowly fell forward, as the oars of the longship fall into the row-locks, and then over the shoulders of the foremost men showed the steel of the five ranks behind them, and their own spears cast long bars of shadow on the whiteness of the sunny road. No sound came from them now save the rattle of their armour and the tramp of their steady feet; but from the Dusky Men rose up hideous confused yelling, and those that could free themselves from the tangle of the throng rushed desperately against the on-rolling hedge of steel, and the whole throng shoved on behind them. Then met steel and men; here and there an ash-stave broke; here

and there a Dusky Felon rolled himself unhurt under the ash-staves, and hewed the knees of the Dalesmen, and a tall man came tottering down; but what men or wood-wights could endure the push of spears of those mighty husbandmen? The Dusky Ones shrunk back yelling, or turned their backs and rushed at their own folk with such fierce agony that they entered into the throng, till the terror of the spear reached to the midmost of it and swayed them back on the hindermost; for neither was there outgate for the felons on the flanks of the spearmen, since there the feathered death beset them, and the bowmen (and the Bride amongst the foremost) shot wholly together, and no shaft flew idly. But the wise leaders of the Dalesmen would not that they should thrust in too far amongst the howling throng of the Dusky Men, lest they should be hemmed in by them; for they were but a handful in regard to them: so there they stayed, barring the way to the Dusky Men, and the bowmen still loosed from the flanks of them, or aimed deftly from betwixt the ranks of the spearmen.

And now was there a space of ten strides or more betwixt the Dalesmen and their foes, over which the spears hung terribly, nor durst the Dusky Men adventure there; and thereon was nought but men dead or sorely hurt. Then suddenly a horn rang thrice shrilly over all the noise and clamour of the throng, and the ranks of the spearmen opened, and forth into that space strode two score of the swordsmen and axe-wielders of the Dale, their weapons raised in their hands, and he who led them was Iron-hand of the House of the Bull: tall he was, wide-shouldered, exceeding strong, but beardless and fair-faced. He bore aloft a two-edged sword, broad-bladed, exceeding heavy, so that few men could wield it in battle, but not right long; it was an ancient weapon, and his father before him

had called it the Barley-scythe. With him were some of the best of the kindreds, as Wolf of Whitegarth, Long-hand of Oakholt, Hart of Highcliff, and War-well the captain of the Bridge. These made no tarrying on that space of the dead, but cried aloud their cries: "For the Burg and the Steer! for the Dale and the Bridge! for the Dale and the Bull!" and so fell at once on the Felons; who fled not, nor had room to flee; and also they feared not the edge-weapons so sorely as they feared those huge spears. So they turned fiercely on the swordsmen, and chiefly on Iron-hand, as he entered in amongst them the first of all, hewing to the right hand and the left, and many a man fell before the Barley-scythe; for they were but little before him. Yet as one fell another took his place, and hewed at him with the steel axe and the crooked sword; and with many strokes they clave his shield and brake his helm and rent his byrny, while he heeded little save smiting with the Barley-scythe, and the blood ran from his arm and his shoulder and his thigh.

But War-well had entered in among the foe on his left hand, and unshielded hove up a great broad-bladed axe, that clave the iron helms of the Dusky Men, and rent their horn-scaled byrnies. He was not very tall, but his shoulders were huge and his arms long, and nought could abide his stroke. He cleared a ring round Iron-hand, whose eyes were growing dim as the blood flowed from him, and hewed three strokes before him; then turned and drew the champion out of the throng, and gave him into the arms of his fellows to stanch the blood that drained away the might of his limbs; and then with a great wordless roar leaped back again on the Dusky Men as the lion leapeth on the herd of swine; and they shrank away before him; and all the swordsmen shouted, "For the Bridge, for

the Bridge!" and pressed on the harder, smiting down all before them. On his left hand now was Hart of Highcliff wielding a good sword hight Chip-driver, wherewith he had slain and hurt a many, fighting wisely with sword and shield, and driving the point home through the joints of the armour. But even therewith, as he drave a great stroke at a lord of the Dusky Ones, a cast-spear came flying and smote him on the breast, so that he staggered, and the stroke fell flatlings on the shield-boss of his foe, and Chip-driver brake atwain nigh the hilts; but Hart closed with him, and smote him on the face with the pommel, and tore his axe from his hand and clave his skull therewith, and slew him with his own weapon, and fought on valiantly beside War-well.

Now War-well had fought so fiercely that he had rent his own hauberk with the might of his strokes, and as he raised his arm to smite a huge stroke, a deft man of the Felons thrust the spike of his war-axe up under his arm; and when War-well felt the smart of the steel, he turned on that man, and, letting his axe fall down to his wrist and hang there by its loop, he caught the foeman up by the neck and the breech, and drave him against the other Dusky Ones before him, so that their weapons pierced and rent their own friend and fellow. Then he put forth the might of his arms and the pith of his body, and hove up that Felon and cast him on to the heads of his fellow murder-carles, so that he rent them and was rent by them. Then War-well fell on again with the axe, and all the champions of the Dale shouted and fell on with him, and the foe shrank away; and the Dales-men cleared a space five fathoms' length before them, and the spearmen drew onward and stood on the space whereon the first onslaught had been.

Then drew those hewers of the Dale together, and

forth from the company came the man that bare the Banner of the Bridge, and the champions gathered round him, and they ordered their ranks and strode with the Banner before them three times to and fro across the road athwart the front of the spearmen, and then with a great shout drew back within the spear-hedge. Albeit five of the champions of the Dale had been slain outright there, and the more part of them hurt more or less.

But when all were well within the ranks, once again blew the horn, and all the spears sank to the rest, and the kindreds drave the spear-furrow, and a space was swept clear before them, and the cries and yells of the Dusky Men were so fierce and wild that the rough voices of the Dalesmen were drowned amidst them.

Forth then came every bowman of the kindred that was there and loosed on the Dusky Men ; and they forsooth had some bowmen amongst them, but cooped up and jostled as they were, they shot but wildly ; whereas each shaft of the Dale went home truly.

But amongst the bowmen forth came the Bride in her glittering war-gear, and stepped lightly to the front of the spearmen. Her own yew bow had been smitten by a shaft and broken in her hand : so she had caught up a short horn bow and a quiver from one of the slain of the Dusky Men ; and now she knelt on one knee under the shadow of the spears nigh to her grandsire Hall-ward, and with a pale face and knitted brow notched and loosed, and notched and loosed on the throng of foemen, as if she were some daintily fashioned engine of war.

So fared the battle on the road that went from the south into the Market-stead. Valiantly had the kindred fought there, and no man of them had blenched, and much had they won ; but the way was perilous before them, for the foe was many and many.

CHAPTER XLV

OF FACE-OF-GOD'S ONSLAUGHT

Now the banners of the Wolf flapped and rippled over the heads of the Woodlanders and the Men of the Wolf; and the men shot all they might, nor took heed now to cover themselves against the shafts of the Dusky Men. As for these, for all they were so many, their arrow-shot was no great matter, for they were in very evil order, as has been said; and moreover, their rage was so great to come to handy strokes with these foemen, that some of them flung away their bows to brandish the axe or the sword. Nevertheless were some among the kindred hurt or slain by their arrows.

Now stood Face-of-god with the foremost; and from where he stood he could see somewhat of the battle of the Dalesmen, and he wotted that it was thriving; therefore he looked before him and close around him, and noted what was toward there. The space betwixt the houses and the break of the bent was crowded with the fury of the Dusky Men tossing their weapons aloft, crying to each other and at the kindred, and here and there loosing a bow-string on them; but whatever was their rage they might not come a many together past a line within ten fathom of the bent's end; for three hundred of the best of bowmen were shooting at them so ceaselessly that no Dusky Man was safe of any bare place of his body, and they fell over one another in that penfold of slaughter, and for all their madness did but little.

Yet was the heart of the War-leader troubled; for he wotted that it might not last for ever, and there seemed no end to the throng of murder-carles; and the time would come when the arrow-shot would be spent,

and they must needs come to handy strokes, and that with so many.

Now a voice spake to him as he gazed with knitted brows and careful heart on that turmoil of battle:

"What now hast thou done with the Sun-beam, and where is her brother? Is the Chief of the Wolf skulking when our work is so heavy? And thou meseemeth art overlate on the field: the mowing of this meadow is no sluggard's work."

He turned and beheld Bow-may, and gazed on her face for a moment, and saw her eyes how they glittered, and how the pommels of her cheeks were burning red and her lips dry and grey; but before he answered he looked all round about to see what was to note; and he touched Bow-may on the shoulder and pointed to down below where a man of the Felons had just come out of the court of one of the houses: a man taller than most, very gaily arrayed, with gilded scales all over him, so that, with his dark face and blue eyes, he looked like some strange dragon. Bow-may spake not, but stamped her foot with anger. Yet if her heart were hot, her hand was steady; for she notched a shaft, and just as the Dusky Chief raised his axe and brandished it aloft, she loosed, and the shaft flew and smote the felon in the armpit and the default of the armour, and he fell to earth. But even as she loosed, Face-of-god cried out in a loud voice:

"O lads of battle! shoot close and all together. Tarry not, tarry not! for we need a little time ere sword meets sword, and the others of the kindreds are at work!"

But Bow-may turned round to him and said: "Wilt thou not answer me? Where is thy kindness gone?"

Even as she was speaking she had notched and loosed another shaft, speaking as folk do who turn from busy work at loom or bench.

Then said Face-of-god: "Shoot on, sister Bow-may! The Sun-beam is gone with her brother, and he is with the Men of the Face."

He broke off here, for a man fell beside him hurt in the neck, and Face-of-god took his bow from his hands and shot a shaft, while one of the women who had been hurt also tended the newly-wounded man. Then Face-of-god went on speaking:

"She was unwilling to go, but Folk-might and I constrained her; for we knew that this is the most perilous place of the battle—hah! see those three felons, Bow-may! they are aiming hither."

And again he loosed and Bow-may also, but a shaft rattled on his helm withal, and another smote a Woodlander beside him, and pierced through the calf of his leg, as he turned and stooped to take fresh arrows from a sheaf that lay there; but the carle took it by the notch and the point, and brake it and drew it out, and then stood up and went on shooting. And Face-of-god spake again:

"Folk-might skulketh not; nor the Men of the Vine, and the Sickle, and the Face, nor the Shepherd-Folk: soon shall they be making our work easy to us, if we can hold our own till then. They are on the other roads that lead into the square. Now suffer me, and shoot on!"

Therewith he looked round about him, and he saw on the left hand that all was quiet; and before him was the confused throng of the Dusky Men trampling their own dead and wounded, and not able as yet to cross that death-line of the arrow so near to them. But on his right hand he saw how they of the kindreds held them firm on the way. Then for a moment of time he considered and thought, till him-seemed he could see the whole battle yet to be foughten; and his face flushed, and he said sharply: "Bow-may,

abide here and shoot, and show the others where to shoot, while the arrows hold out; but we will go further for a while, and ye shall follow when we have made the rent great enough."

She turned to him and said: "Why art thou not more joyous? thou art like an host without music or banners."

"Nay," said he, "heed not me, but my bidding!"

She said hastily: "I think I shall die here; since for all we have shot we minish them nowise. Now kiss me this once amidst the battle, and say farewell."

He said: "Nay, nay; it shall not go thus. Abide a little while, and thou shalt see all this tangle open, as the sun cleaveth the clouds on the autumn morning. Yet lo thou! since thou wilt have it so."

And he bent forward and kissed her face, and now the tears ran over it, and she said smiling somewhat: "Now is this more than I looked for, whatso may betide."

But while she was yet speaking he cried in a great voice: "Ye who have spent your shot, or have nigh spent it, to axe and sword, and follow me to clear the ground 'twixt the bent and the halls. Let each help each, but throng not each other. Shoot wisely, ye bowmen, and keep our backs clear of the foe. On, on! for the Burg and the Face, for the Burg and the Face!"

Therewith he leapt down the steep of the hill, bounding like the hart, with Dale-warden naked in his hand; and they that followed were two score and ten; and the arrows of their bowmen rained over their heads on the Dusky Men, as they smote down the first of the foemen, and the others shrieked and shrank from them, or turned on them smiting wildly and desperately.

But Face-of-god swept round the great sword and plunged into that sea of turmoil and noise and evil

sights and savours, and even therewith he heard clearly a voice that said: "Gold-ring, I am hurt; take my bow a while!" and knew it for Bow-may's; but it came to his ears like the song of a bird without meaning; for it was as if his life were changed at once; and in a minute or two he had cut thrice with the edge and thrust twice with the point, eager, but clear-eyed and deft; and he saw as in a picture the foe before him, and the grey roofs of Silver-stead, and through the gap in them the tops of the blue ridges far aloof. And now had three fallen before him, and they feared him, and turned on him, and smote so many together that their strokes crossed each other, and one warded him from the other; and he laughed aloud and shielded himself, and drave the point of Dale-warden amidst the tangle of weapons through the open mouth of a captain of the Felons, and slashed a cheek with a back-stroke, and swept round the edge to his right hand and smote off a blue-eyed snub-nosed head; and therewith a poleaxe smote him on the left side of his helm, so that he tottered; but he swung himself round, and stood stark and upright, and gave a short hack with the edge, keeping Dale-warden well in hand, and a gold-clad Felon, a champion of them, and their tallest on the ground, fell aback, his throat gaping more than the mouth of him.

Then Face-of-god shouted and waved Dale-warden aloft to the Banner of the Wolf that floated behind and above him, and he cried out: "As I have promised so have I done!" And he looked about, and beheld how valiantly his fellows had been doing; for before him now was a space of earth with no man standing on his feet thereon, like the swathe of the mowers of June; and beyond that was the crowd of the Dusky Men wavering like the tall grass abiding the scythe.

But a minute, and they fell to casting at Face-of-god

and his fellows spears and knives and shields and whatsoever would fly; and a spear smote him on the breast, but entered not; and a bossed shield fell over his face withal, and a plummet of sling-lead smote his helm, and he fell to earth; but leapt up again straightway, and heard as he arose a great shout close to him, and a shrill cry, and lo! at his left side Bow-may, her sword in her hand, and the hand red with blood from a shaft-graze on her wrist, and a white cloth stained with blood about her neck; and on his right side Wood-wise bearing the banner and crying the Wolf-whoop; for the whole company was come down from the slope and stood around him.

Then for a little while was there such a stilling of the tumult about him there, that he heard great and glad cries from the Road of the South of "The Burg and the Steer! The Dale and the Bridge! The Dale and the Bull!" And thereafter a terrible great shrieking cry, and a huge voice that cried: "Death, death, death to the Dusky Men!" And thereafter again fierce cries and great tumult of the battle.

Then Face-of-god shook Dale-warden in the air, and strode forward fiercely, but not speedily, and the whole company went foot for foot along with him; and as he went, would he or would he not, song came into his mouth, a song of the meadows of the Dale, even such as this:

The wheat is done blooming and rust 's on the sickle,
And green are the meadows grown after the scythe.
Come, hands for the dance! For the toil hath been mickle,
And 'twixt haysel and harvest 'tis time to be blithe.

And what shall the tale be now dancing is over,
And kind on the meadow sits maiden by man,
And the old man bethinks him of days of the lover,
And the warrior remembers the field that he wan?

Shall we tell of the dear days wherein we are dwelling,
The best days of our Mother, the cherishing Dale,
When all round about us the summer is telling,
To ears that may hearken, the heart of the tale?

Shall we sing of these hands and these lips that caress us,
And the limbs that sun-dappled lie light here beside,
When still in the morning they rise but to bless us,
And oft in the midnight our footsteps abide?

O nay, but to tell of the fathers were better,
And of how we were fashioned from out of the earth;
Of how the once lowly spurned strong at the fetter;
Of the days of the deeds and beginning of mirth.

And then when the feast-tide is done in the morning,
Shall we whet the grey sickle that bideth the wheat,
Till wan grow the edges, and gleam forth a warning
Of the field and the fallow where edges shall meet.

And when cometh the harvest, and hook upon shoulder
We enter the red wheat from out of the road,
We shall sing, as we wend, of the bold and the bolder,
And the Burg of their building, the beauteous abode.

As smiteth the sickle amid the sun's burning
We shall sing how the sun saw the token unfurled,
When forth fared the Folk, with no thought of returning,
In the days when the Banner went wide in the world.

Many saw that he was singing, but heard not the words of his mouth, for great was the noise and clamour. But he heard Bow-may, how she laughed by his side, and cried out:

"Gold-mane, dear-heart, now art thou merry indeed; and glad am I, though they told me that I am hurt.—Ah! now beware, beware!"

For indeed the Dusky Men, seeing the wall of steel rolling down on them, and cooped up by the houses, so that they scarce knew how to flee, turned in the face

of death, the foremost of them, and rushed furiously on the array of the Woodlanders, and all those behind pressed on them like the big wave of the ebbing sea when the gust of the wind driveth it landward.

The Woodlanders met them, shouting out: "The Greenwood and the Wolf, the Greenwood and the Wolf!" But not a few of them fell there, though they gave not back a foot; for so fierce now were the Dusky Men, that hewing and thrusting at them availed nought, unless they were slain outright or stunned; and even if they fell they rolled themselves up against their tall foemen, heeding not death or wounds if they might but slay or wound. There then fell War-grove and ten others of the Woodlanders, and four men of the Wolf, but none before he had slain his foeman; and as each man fell or was hurt grievously, another took his place.

Now a felon leapt up and caught Gold-ring by the neck and drew him down, while another strove to smite his head off; but the stout carle drave a wood-knife into the side of the first felon, and drew it out speedily and smote the other, the smiter, in the face with the same knife, and therewith they all three rolled together on the earth amongst the feet of men. Even so did another felon by Bow-may, and dragged her down to the ground, and smote her with a long knife as she tumbled down; and this was a feat of theirs, for they were long-armed like apes.

But as to this felon, Dale-warden's edge split his skull, and Face-of-god gathered his might together and bestrode Bow-may, till he had hewed a space round about him with great two-handed strokes; and yet the blade brake not. Then he caught up Bow-may from the earth, and the felon's knife had not pierced her hauberk, but she was astonied, and might not stand upon her feet; and Face-of-god turned aside a little with her, and half bore her, half thrust her

through the throng to the rearward of his folk, and left her there with two carlines of the Wolf who followed the host for leechcraft's sake, and then turned back shouting: "For the Face, for the Face!" and there followed him back to the battle, a band of those who were fresh as yet, and their blades unbloodied, the young men of the Woodlands.

The wearier fighters made way for them as they came on shouting, and Face-of-god was ahead of them all, and leapt at the foemen as a man unwearied and striking his first stroke, so wondrous hale he was; and they drave a wedge amidst of the Dusky Men, and then turned about and stood back to back hewing at all that drifted on them. But as Face-of-god cleared a space about him, lo! almost within reach of his sword-point up rose a grim shape from the earth, tall, grey-haired, and bloody-faced, who uttered the Wolf-whoop from amidst the terror of his visage, and turned and swung round his head an axe of the Dusky Men, and fell to smiting them with their own weapon. The Dusky Men shrieked in answer to his whoop, and all shrunk from him and Face-of-god; but a cry of joy went up from the kindred, for they knew Gold-ring, whom they deemed had been slain. So they all pressed on together, smiting down the foe before them, and the Dusky Men, some turned their backs and drave those behind them, till they too turned and were strained through the passages and courts of the houses, and some were overthrown and trodden down as they strove to hold face to the Woodlanders, and some were hewn down where they stood; but the whole throng of those that were on their feet drifted toward the Market-place, the Woodlanders following them ever with point and edge, till betwixt the bent and the houses no foeman stood up against them.

Then they stood together, and raised the whoop of

victory, and blew their horns long and loud in token of their joy, and the Woodland men lifted up their voices and sang:

Now far, far aloof
Standeth lintel and roof,
The dwelling of days
Of the Woodland ways:
Now nought wendeth there
Save the wolf and the bear,
And the fox of the waste
Faring soft without haste.
No carle the axe whetteth on oak-laden hill;
No shaft the hart letteth to wend at his will;
None heedeth the thunder-clap over the glade,
And the wind-storm thereunder makes no man afraid.
Is it thus then that endeth man's days on Mid-earth,
For no man there wendeth in sorrow or mirth?

Nay, look down on the road
From the ancient abode!
Betwixt acre and field
Shineth helm, shineth shield.
And high over the heath
Fares the bane in his sheath;
For the wise men and bold
Go their ways o'er the wold.
Now the Warrior hath given them heart and fair day,
Unbidden, undriven, they fare to the fray.
By the rock and the river the banners they bear,
And their battle-staves quiver 'neath halbert and spear;
On the hill's brow they gather, and hang o'er the Dale
As the clouds of the Father hang, laden with bale.

Down shineth the sun
On the war-deed half done;
All the fore-doomed to die,
In the pale dust they lie.
There they leapt, there they fell,
And their tale shall we tell;
But we, e'en in the gate
Of the war-garth we wait,

Till the drift of war-weather shall whistle us on,
And we tread all together the way to be won,
To the dear land, the dwelling for whose sake we came
To do deeds for the telling of song-becrowned fame.
Settle helm on the head then! Heave sword for the Dale!
Nor be mocked of the dead men for deedless and pale.

CHAPTER XLVI

MEN MEET IN THE MARKET OF SILVER-STEAD

So sang they; but Face-of-god went with Red-wolf, who was hurt sorely, but not deadly, and led him back toward the place just under the break of the bent; and there he found Bow-may in the hands of the women who were tending her hurts. She smiled on him from a pale face as he drew nigh, and he looked kindly at her, but he might not abide there, for haste was in his feet. He left Red-wolf to the tending of the women, and clomb the bent hastily, and when he deemed he was high enough, he looked about him; and somewhat more than half an hour had worn since Bow-may had sped the first shaft against the Dusky Men.

He looked down into the Market-stead, and deemed he could see that nigh the Mote-house the Dusky Men were gathering into some better order; but they were no longer drifting toward the southern bents, but were standing round about the Altar as men abiding somewhat; and he deemed that they had gotten more bowshot than before, and that most of them bare bows. Though so many had been slain in the battles of the southern bents, yet was the Market-stead full of them, so to say, for others had come thereto in place of those that had fallen.

But now as he looked arose mighty clamour amongst them; and a little west of the Altar was a stir and a hurrying onward and around as in the eddies of a swift stream. Face-of-god wotted not what was betiding there, but he deemed that they were now ware of the onfall of Folk-might and Hall-face and the men of Burgdale, for their faces were all turned to where that was to be looked for.

So he turned and looked on the road to the east of him, where had been the battle of the Steer, but now it was all gone down toward the Market-place, and he could but hear the clamour of it; but nought he saw thereof, because of the houses that hid it.

Then he cast his eyes on the road that entered the Market-stead from the north, and he saw thereon many men gathered; and he wotted not what they were; for though there were weapons amongst them, yet were they not all weaponed, as far as he could see.

Now as he looked this way and that, and deemed that he must tarry no longer, but must enter into the courts of the houses before him and make his way into the Market-stead, lo! a change in the throng of Dusky Warriors nigh the Mote-house, and the ordered bands about the Altar fell to drifting toward the western way with one accord, with great noise and hurry and fierce cries of wrath. Then made Face-of-god no delay, but ran down the bent at once, and at the break of it came upon Bow-may standing upright, and sword in hand; and as he passed, she joined herself to him, and said: "What new tidings now, Gold-mane?"

"Tidings of battle!" he cried; "tidings of victory! Folk-might hath fallen on, and the Dusky Men run hastily to meet him. Hark, hark!"

For as he spoke came a great noise of horns, and Bow-may said: "What horn is that blowing?"

He stayed not, but shouted aloud: "For the Face, for the Face! Now will we fall upon their backs!"

Therewith was he come to his company, and he cried out to them: "Heard ye the horn, heard ye the horn? Now follow me into the Market-place; much is yet to do!"

Even therewith came the sound of other horns, and all men were silent a moment, and then shouted all together, for the Woodlanders knew it for the horn of the Shepherds coming on by the eastward way.

But Face-of-god waved his sword aloft and set on at once, and they followed and gat them through the courts of the houses and their passages into the Market-place. There they found more room than they looked to find; for the foemen had drawn away on the left hand toward the battle of Folk-might, and on the right hand toward the battle of the Steer; and great was the noise and cry that came thence.

Now stood Face-of-god under the two banners of the Wolf in the Market-place of Silver-stead, and scarce had he time to be high-hearted, for needs must he ponder in his mind what thing were best to do. For on the left hand he deemed the foe was the strongest and best ordered; but there also were the kindreds the doughtiest, and it was little like that the Felons should overcome the spear-casters of the Face and the glaive-bearers of the Sickle, and the bowmen of the Vine: there also were the wisest leaders, as the stark elder Stone-face, and the tall Hall-face, and his father of the unshaken heart, and above all Folk-might, fierce in his wrath, but his anger burning steady and clear, like the oaken butt on the hearth of the hall.

Then as his mind pictured him amongst the foe, it made therewith another picture of the slender warrior Sun-beam caught in the tangle of battle, and longing for him and calling for him amidst the hard hand-

play. And thereat his face flushed, and all his body waxed hot, and he was on the very point of leading the onset against the foe on the left. But therewith he bethought him of the bold men of the Steer and the Bridge and the Bull weary with much fighting; and he remembered also that the Bride was amongst them and fighting, it might be, amidst the foremost, and if she were slain how should he ever hold up his head again. He bethought him also that the Shepherds, who had fallen on by the eastern road, valiant as they were, were scarce so well armed or so well led as the others. Therewithal he bethought him (and again it came like a picture into his mind) of falling on the foemen by whom the southern battle was beset, and then the twain of them meeting the Shepherds, and lastly, all those three companies joined together clearing the Market-place, and meeting the men under Folk-might in the midst thereof.

Therefore, scant had he been pondering these things in his mind for a minute ere he cried out: "Blow up horns, blow up! forward banners, and follow me, O valiant men! to the helping of the Steer, the Bridge, and the Bull; deep have they thrust into the Dusky Throng, and belike are hard pressed. Hark how the clamour ariseth from their besetters! On now, on!"

Therewith hung a star of sunlight on his sword as he raised it aloft, and the Wolf-whoop rang out terribly in the Market-place, for now had the Woodlanders also learned it, and the hearts of the foemen sank as they heard the might and the mass thereof. Then the battle of the Woodlanders swept round and fell upon the flank of them who were besetting the kindreds, as an iron bar smiteth the soft fir-wood; and they of the kindreds heard their cry, but faintly and confusedly, so great was the turmoil of battle about them.

Now once more was Bow-may by the side of Face-

of-god; and if she had not the might of the mightiest, yet had she the deftness of the deftest. And now was she calm and cool, shielding herself with a copper-bossed target, and driving home the point of her sharp sword; white was her face, and her eyes glittered amidst it, and she seemed to men like to those on whose heads the Warrior hath laid the Holy Bread.

As to Wood-wise, he had given the Banner of the red-jawed Wolf to Stone-wolf, a huge and dreadful warrior some forty winters old, who had fought in the Great Overthrow, and now hewed down the Dusky Men, wielding a heavy short-sword left-handed. But Wood-wise himself fought with a great sword, giving great strokes to the right hand and the left, and was no more hasty than is the hewer in the winter wood.

Face-of-god fought wisely and coldly now, and looked more to warding his friends than destroying his foes, and both to Bow-may and Wood-wise his sword was a shield; for oft he took the life from the edge of the upraised axe, and stayed the point of the foeman in mid-air.

Even so wisely fought the whole band of the Woodlanders and the Wolves, who got within smiting space of the foe; for they had no will to cast away their lives when assured victory was so nigh to them. Sooth to say, the hand-play was not so hard to them as it had been betwixt the bent and the houses; for the Dusky Men were intent on dealing with the men of the kindreds from the southern road, who stood war-wearied before them; and they were hewing and casting at them, and baying and yelling like dogs; and though they turned about to meet the storm of the Woodlanders, yet their hearts failed them withal, and they strove to edge away from betwixt those two fearful scythes of war, fighting as men fleeing, not as men in onset. But still the Woodlanders and the Wolves came on, hewing and thrusting, smiting down

the foemen in heaps, till the Dusky Throng grew thin, and the staves of the Dalesmen and their bright banners in the morning sun were clear to see, and at last their very faces, kindly and familiar, worn and strained with the stress of battle, or laughing wildly, or pale with the fury of the fight. Then rose up to the heavens the blended shout of the Woodlanders and the Dalesmen, and now there was nought of foemen betwixt them save the dead and the wounded.

Then Face-of-god thrust his sword into its sheath all bloody as it was, and strode over the dead men to where Hall-ward stood under the banner of the Steer, and cast his arms about the old carle, and kissed him for joy of the victory. But Hall-ward thrust him aback and looked him in the face, and his cheeks were pale and his lips clenched, and his eyes haggard and staring, and he said in a harsh voice:

"O young man, she is dead! I saw her fall. The Bride is dead, and thou hast lost thy troth-plight maiden. O death, death to the Dusky Men!"

Then grew Face-of-god as pale as a linen sleeve, and all the new-comers groaned and cried out. But a bystander said: "Nay, nay, it is nought so bad as that; she is hurt, and sorely; but she liveth yet."

Face-of-god heard him not. He forgot Dale-warden lying in his sheath, and he saw that the last speaker had a great wood-axe broad and heavy in his hand, so he cried: "Man, man, thine axe!" and snatched it from him, and turned about to the foe again, and thrust through the ranks, suffering none to stay him till all his friends were behind and all his foes before him. And as he burst forth from the ranks waving his axe aloft, bare-headed now, his yellow hair flying abroad, his mouth crying out, "Death, death, death to the Dusky Men!" fear of him smote their hearts, and they howled and fled before him as they might; for

they said that the Dalesmen had prayed their Gods into the battle. But not so fast could they flee but he was presently amidst them, smiting down all about him, and they so terror-stricken that scarce might they raise a hand against him. All that blended host followed him mad with wrath and victory, and as they pressed on, they heard behind them the horns and war-cries of the Shepherds falling on from the east. Nought they heeded that now, but drave on a fearful storm of war, and terrible was the slaughter of the Felons.

It was but a few minutes ere they had driven them up against that great stack of faggots that had been dight for the burnt-offering of men, and many of the felons had mounted up on to it, and now in their anguish of fear were shooting arrows and casting spears on all about them, heeding little if they were friend or foe. Now were the men of the kindreds at point to climb this twiggen burg; but by this time the fury of Face-of-god had run clear, and he knew where he was and what he was doing; so he stayed his folk, and cried out to them: "Forbear, climb not! let the torch help the sword!" And therewith he looked about and saw the fire-pot which had been set down there for the kindling of the bale-fire, and the coals were yet red in it; so he snatched up a dry brand and lighted it thereat, and so did divers others, and they thrust them among the faggots, and the fire caught at once, and the tongues of flame began to leap from faggot to faggot till all was in a light low; for the wood had been laid for that very end, and smeared with grease and oil so that the burning to the god might be speedy.

But the fierceness of the kindreds heeded not the fire, nor overmuch the men who leapt down from the stack before it, but they left all behind them, faring

straight toward the western outgate from the Market-stead; and Face-of-god still led them on; though by now he was wholly come to his right mind again, albeit the burden of sorrow yet lay heavy on his heart. He had broken his axe, and had once more drawn Dale-warden from his sheath, and many felt his point and edge.

But now, as they chased, came a rush of men upon them again, as though a new onset were at hand. That saw Face-of-god and Hall-ward and War-well, and other wise leaders of men, and they bade their folk forbear the chase, and lock their ranks to meet the onfall of this new wave of foemen. And they did so, and stood fast as a wall; but lo! the onrush that drave up against them was but a fleeing shrieking throng, and no longer an array of warriors, for many had cast away their weapons, and were rushing they knew not whither; for they were being thrust on the bitter edges of Face-of-god's companies by the terror of the fleers from the onset of the men of the Face, the Sickle, and the Vine, whom Hall-face and Stone-face were leading, along with Folk-might. Then once again the men of Face-of-god gave forth the whoop of victory, and pressed forward again, hewing their way through the throng of fleers, but turning not to chase to the right or the left; while at their backs came on the Shepherd-Folk, who had swept down all that withstood them; for now indeed was the Market-stead getting thinner of living men.

So led the War-leader his ordered ranks, till at last over the tangled crowd of runaways he saw the banners of the Burg and the Face flashing against the sun, and heard the roar of the kindreds as they drave the chase towards them. Then he lifted up his sword, and stood still, and all the host behind him stayed and cast a huge shout up to the heavens, and there they abode the coming of the other Dalesmen.

But the War-leader sent a message to Hound-under-Greenbury, bidding him lead the Shepherds to the chase of the Dusky Men, who were now all fleeing toward the northern outgate of the Market. Howbeit he called to mind the throng he had seen on the northern road before they were come into the Market-stead, and deemed that way also death awaited the foemen, even if the men of the kindreds forbore them.

But presently the space betwixt the Woodlanders and the men of the Face was clear of all but the dead, so that friend saw the face of friend; and it could be seen that the warriors of the Face were ruddy and smiling for joy, because the battle had been easy to them, and but few of them had fallen; for the Dusky Men, who had left the Market-stead to fall on them, had had room for fleeing behind them, and had speedily turned their backs before the spear-casting of the men of the Face and the onrush of the swordsmen.

There then stood these victorious men facing one another, and the banner-bearers on either side came through the throng, and brought the banners together between the two hosts; and the Wolf kissed the Face, and the Sickle and the Vine met the Steer and the Bridge and the Bull: but the Shepherds were yet chasing the fleers.

There in the forefront stood Hall-face the tall, with the joy of battle in his eyes. And Stone-face, the wise carle in war, stood solemn and stark beside him; and there was the goodly body and the fair and kindly visage of the Alderman smiling on the faces of his friends. But as for Folk-might, his face was yet white and aweful with anger, and he looked restlessly up and down the front of the kindreds, though he spake no word.

Then Face-of-god could no longer forbear, but he thrust Dale-warden into his sheath, and ran forward and cast his arms about his father's neck and kissed

him; and the blood of himself and of the foemen was on him, for he had been hurt in divers places, but not sorely, because of the good hammer-work of the Alderman.

Then he kissed his brother and Stone-face, and he took Folk-might by the hand, and was on the point of speaking some word to him, when the ranks of the Face opened, and lo! the Sun-beam in her bright war-gear, and the sword girt to her side, and she unhurt and unsullied.

Then was it to him as when he met her first in Shadowy Vale, and he thought of little else than her; but she stepped lightly up to him, and unashamed before the whole host she kissed him on the mouth, and he cast his mailed arms about her, and joy made him forget many things and what was next to do, though even at that moment came afresh a great clamour of shrieks and cries from the northern outgate of the Market-stead: and the burning pile behind them cast a great wavering flame into the air, contending with the bright sun of that fair day, now come hard on noontide. But ere he drew away his face from the Sun-beam's, came memory to him, and a sharp pang shot through his heart, as he heard Folk-might say: "Where then is the Shield-may of Burgstead? where is the Bride?"

And Face-of-god said under his breath: "She is dead, she is dead!" And then he stared out straight before him and waited till someone else should say it aloud. But Bow-may stepped forward and said: "Chief of the Wolf, be of good cheer; our kinswoman is hurt, but not deadly."

The Alderman's face changed, and he said: "Hast thou seen her, Bow-may?"

"Nay," she said. "How should I leave the battle? but others have told me who have seen her."

Folk-might stared into the ranks of men before him, but said nothing. Said the Alderman: "Is she well tended?"

"Yea, surely," said Bow-may, "since she is amongst friends, and there are no foemen behind us."

Then came a voice from Folk-might which said: "Now were it best to send good men and deft in arms, and who know Silverdale, from house to house, to search for foemen who may be lurking there."

The Alderman looked kindly and sadly on him and said: "Kinsman Stone-face, and Hall-face my son, the brunt of the battle is now over, and I am but a simple man amongst you; therefore, if ye will give me leave, I will go see this poor kinswoman of ours, and comfort her."

They bade him go: so he sheathed his sword, and went through the press with two men of the Steer toward the southern road; for the Bride had been brought into a house nigh the corner of the Market-place.

But Face-of-god looked after his father as he went, and remembrance of past days came upon him, and such a storm of grief swept over him, as he thought of the Bride lying pale and bleeding and brought anigh to her death, that he put his hands to his face and wept as a child that will not be comforted; nor had he any shame of all those bystanders, who in sooth were men good and kindly, and had no shame of his grief or marvelled at it, for indeed their own hearts were sore for their lovely kinswoman, and many of them also wept with Face-of-god. But the Sun-beam stood by and looked on her betrothed, and she thought many things of the Bride, and was sorry, albeit no tears came into her eyes; then she looked askance at Folk-might and trembled; but he said coldly, and in a loud voice:

"Needs must we search the houses for the lurking felons, or many a man will yet be murdered. Let Wood-wicked lead a band of men at once from house to house."

Then said a man of the Wolf hight Hardgrip: "Wood-wicked was slain betwixt the bent and the houses."

Said Folk-might: "Let it be Wood-wise then."

But Bow-may said: "Wood-wise is even now hurt in the leg by a wounded felon, and may not go afoot."

Then said Folk-might: "Is Crow the Shaft-speeder anigh?"

"Yea, here am I," quoth a tall man of fifty winters, coming from out the ranks where stood the Wolves.

Said Folk-might: "Kinsman Crow, do thou take two score and ten of doughty men who are not too hot-headed, and search every house about the Market-place; but if ye come on any house that makes a stout defence, send ye word thereof to the Mote-house, where we will presently be, and we shall send you help. Slay every felon that ye fall in with; but if ye find in the houses any of the poor folk crouching and afraid, comfort their hearts all ye may, and tell them that now is life come to them."

So Crow fell to getting his band together, and presently departed with them on his errand.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE KINDREDS WIN THE MOTE-HOUSE

THE din and tumult still came from the north side of the Market-place, so that all the air was full of noise; and Face-of-god deemed that the thralls had gotten weapons into their hands and were slaying their masters.

Now he lifted up his face, and put his hand on Folk-might's shoulder, and said in a loud voice:

"Kinsmen, it were well if our brother were to bid the banners into the Mote-house of the Wolf, and let all the Host set itself in array before the said house, and abide till the chasers of the foe come to us thither; for I perceive that they are now become many, and are more than those of our kindred."

Then Folk-might looked at him with kind eyes, and said:

"Thou sayest well, brother; even so let it be!"

And he lifted up his sword, and Face-of-god cried out in a loud voice: "Forward, banners! blow up horns! fare we forth with victory!"

So the Host drew its ranks together in good order, and they all set forward, and old Stone-face took the Sun-beam by the hand and led on behind Folk-might and the War-leader. But when they came to the Hall, then saw they how the steps that led up to the door were high and double, going up from each side without any railing or fool-guard; and crowding the stairs and the platform thereof was a band of the Dusky Men, as many as could stand thereon, who shot arrows at the host of the kindreds, howling like dogs, and chattering like apes; and arrows and spears came from the windows of the Hall; yea, and on the very roof a score of these felons were riding the ridge and mocking like the trolls of old days.

Now when they saw this they stayed a while, and men shielded them against the shafts; but the leaders drew together in front of the Host, and Folk-might fell to speech; and his face was very pale and stern; for now he had had time to think of the case of the Bride, and fierce wrath, and grief unholpen filled his soul. So he said:

"Brothers, this is my business to deal with; for I

see before me the stair that leadeth to the Mote-house of my people, and now would I sit there whereas my fathers sat, when peace was on the Dale, as once more it shall be to-morrow. Therefore up this stair will I go, and none shall hinder me; and let no man of the host follow me till I have entered into the Hall, unless perchance I fall dead by the way; but stand ye still and look on."

"Nay," said Face-of-god, "this is partly the business of the War-leader. There are two stairs. Be content to take the southern one, and I will take the northern. We shall meet on the plain stone at the top."

But Hall-face said: "War-leader, may I speak?"

"Speak, brother," said Face-of-god.

Said Hall-face: "I have done but little to-day, War-leader. I would stand by thee on the northern stair; so shall Folk-might be content, if he doeth two men's work who are not little-hearted."

Said Face-of-god: "The doom of the War-leader is that Folk-might shall fall on by the southern stair to slake his grief and increase his glory, and Face-of-god and Hall-face by the northern. Haste to the work, O brothers!"

And he and Hall-face went to their places, while all looked on. But the Sun-beam, with her hand still in Stone-face's, she turned white to the lips, and stared with wild eyes before her, not knowing where she was; for she had deemed that the battle was over, and Face-of-god saved from it.

But Folk-might tossed up his head and laughed, and cried out, "At last, at last!" And his sword was in his hand, the Sleep-thorn to wit, a blade of ancient fame; so now he let it fall and hang to his wrist by the leash, while he clapped his hands together and uttered the Wolf-whoop mightily, and all the men of the Wolf that were in the host, and the Woodlanders

withal, uttered it with him. Then he put his shield over his head and stood before the first of the steps, and the Dusky Men laughed to see one man come against them, though there was death in their hearts. But he laughed back at them in triumph, and set his foot on the step, and let Sleep-thorn's point go into the throat of a Dusky lord, and thrust amongst them, hewing right and left, and tumbling men over the edge of the stair, which was to them as the narrow path along the cliff-side that hangeth over the unfathomed sea. They hewed and thrust at him in turn; but so close were they packed that their weapons crossed about him, and one shielded him from the other, and they swayed staggering on that fearful verge, while the Sleep-thorn crept here and there amongst them, lulling their hot fury. For, as desperate as they were, and fighting for death and not for life, they had a horror of him and of the sea of hatred below them, and feared where to set their feet, and he feared nought at all, but from feet to sword-point was but an engine of slaughter, while the heart within him throbbed with fury long held back as he thought upon the Bride and her wounding, and all the wrongs of his people since their Great Undoing.

So he smote and thrust, till him-seemed the throng of foes thinned before him: with his sword-pommel he smote a lord of the Dusky Ones in the face, so that he fell over the edge amongst the spears of the kindred; then he thrust the point of Sleep-thorn towards the Hall-door through the breast of another, and then it seemed to him that he had but one before him; so he hove up the edges to cleave him down, but ere the stroke fell, close to his ears exceeding loud rang out the cry, "For the Burg and the Face! for the Face, for the Face!" and he drew aback a little, and his eyes cleared, and lo! it was Hall-face the tall, his

long sword all reddened with battle; and beside him stood Face-of-god, silent and panting, his face pale with the fierce anger of the fight, and the weariness which was now at last gaining upon him. There stood those three with no other living man upon the plain of the stairs.

Then Face-of-god turned shouting to the Folk, and cried:

"Forth now with the banners! For now is the Wolf come home. On into the Hall, O Kindred of the Gods!"

Then poured the Folk up over the stairs and into the Hall of the Wolf, the banners flapping over their heads; and first went the War-leader and Folk-might and Hall-face, and then the three delivered thralls, Wolf-stone, God-swain, and Spear-fist, and Dallach with them, though both he and Wolf-stone had been hurt in the battle; and then came blended together the Men of the Face along with them of the Wolf who had entered the Market-stead with them, and with these were Stone-face and Wood-wont and Bow-may, leading the Sun-beam betwixt them; and now was she come to herself again, though her face was yet pale, and her eyes gleamed as she stepped across the threshold of the Hall.

But when a many were gotten in, and the first-comers had had time to handle their weapons and look about them, a cry of the utmost wrath broke from Folk-might and those others who remembered the Hall from of old. For wretched and befouled was that well-builded house: the hangings rent away; the goodly painted walls daubed and smeared with wicked tokens of the Alien murderers: the floor, once bright with polished stones of the mountain, and strewn with sweet-smelling flowers, was now as foul as the den of the man-devouring troll of the heaths. From the fair-

carven roof of oak and chestnut-beams hung ugly knots of rags and shapeless images of the sorcery of the Dusky Men. And furthermore, and above all, from the last tie-beam of the roof over the dais dangled four shapes of men-at-arms, whom the older men of the Wolf knew at once for the embalmed bodies of their four great chieftains, who had been slain on the day of the Great Undoing; and they cried out with horror and rage as they saw them hanging there in their weapons as they had lived.

There was the Hostage of the Earth, his shield painted with the green world circled with the worm of the sea. There was the older Folk-might, the uncle of the living man, bearing a shield with an oak and a lion done thereon. There was Wealth-eker, on whose shield was done a golden sheaf of wheat. There was he who bore a name great from of old, Folk-wolf to wit, bearing on his shield the axe of the hewer. There they hung, dusty, befouled, with sightless eyes and grinning mouths, in the dimmed sunlight of the Hall, before the eyes of that victorious Host, stricken silent at the sight of them.

Underneath them on the dais stood the last remnant of the battle of the Dusky Men; and they, as men mad with coming death, shook their weapons, and with shrieking laughter mocked at the overcomers, and pointed to the long-dead chiefs, and called on them in the tongue of the kindreds to come down and lead their dear kinsmen to the high-seat; and then they cried out to the living warriors of the Wolf, and bade them better their deed of slaying, and set to work to make alive again, and cause their kinsmen to live merry on the earth.

With that last mock they handled their weapons and rushed howling on the warriors to meet their death; nor was it long denied them; for the sword of the

Wolf, the axe of the Woodland, and the spear of the Dale soon made an end of the dreadful lives of these destroyers of the Folks.

CHAPTER XLVIII

MEN SING IN THE MOTE-HOUSE

THEN strode the Warriors of the Wolf over the bodies of the slain on to the dais of their own Hall; and Folk-might led the Sun-beam by the hand, and now was his sword in its sheath, and his face was grown calm, though it was stern and sad. But even as he trod the dais comes a slim swain of the Wolves twisting himself through the throng, and so maketh way to Folk-might, and saith to him:

"Chieftain, the Alderman of Burgdale sendeth me hither to say a word to thee; even this, which I am to tell to thee and the War-leader both: It is most true that our kinswoman the Bride will not die, but live. So help me, the Warrior and the Face! This is the word of the Alderman."

When Folk-might heard this, his face changed and he hung his head; and Face-of-god, who was standing close by, beheld him and deemed that tears were falling from his eyes on to the hall-floor. As for him, he grew exceeding glad, and he turned to the Sun-beam and met her eyes, and saw that she could scarce refrain her longing for him; and he was abashed for the sweetness of his love. But she drew close up to him, and spake to him softly and said:

"This is the day that maketh amends; and yet I long for another day. When I saw thee coming to me that first day in Shadowy Vale, I thought thee so

goodly a warrior that my heart was in my mouth. But now how goodly thou art! For the battle is over, and we shall live."

"Yea," said Face-of-god, "and none shall begrudge us our love. Behold thy brother, the hard-heart, the warrior; he weepeth because he hath heard that the Bride shall live. Be sure then that she shall not gainsay him. O fair shall the world be to-morrow!"

But she said: "O Gold-mane, I have no words. Is there no minstrelsy amongst us?"

Now by this time were many of the men of the Wolf and the Woodlanders gathered on the dais of the Hall; and the Dalesmen noting this, and wotting that these men were now in their own Mote-house, withdrew them as they might for the press toward the nether end thereof. That the Sun-beam noted, and that all those about her save the War-leader were of the kindreds of the Wolf and the Woodland, and, still speaking softly, she said to Face-of-god:

"Gold-mane, meseemeth I am now in my wrong place; for now the Wolf raiseth up his head, but I am departing from him. Surely I should now be standing amongst my people of the Face, whereto I am going ere long."

He said: "Beloved, I am now become thy kindred and thine home, it is meet for thee to stand beside me."

She cast her eyes adown and answered not; and she fell a-pondering of how sorely she had desired that fair dale, and now she would leave it, and be content and more than content.

But now the kindreds had sundered, they upon the dais ranked themselves together there in the House which their fathers had builded; and when they saw themselves so meetly ordered, their hearts being full with the sweetness of hope accomplished and the joy of deliverance from death, song arose amongst them,

and they fell to singing together ; and this is somewhat of their singing :

Now raise we the lay
Of the long-coming day !
Bright, white was the sun
When we saw it begun :
O'er its noon now we live ;
It hath ceased not to give ;
It shall give, and give more
From the wealth of its store.
O fair was the yesterday ! Kindly and good
Was the wasteland our guester, and kind was the wood ;
Though below us for reaping lay under our hand
The harvest of weeping, the grief of the land ;
Dumb cowered the sorrow, nought daring to cry
On the help of to-morrow, the deed drawing nigh.

All increase throve
In the Dale of our love ;
There the ox and the steed
Fed down the mead ;
The grapes hung high
'Twixt earth and sky,
And the apples fell
Round the orchard well.
Yet drear was the land there, and all was for nought ;
None put forth a hand there for what the year wrought,
And raised it o'erflowing with gifts of the earth.
For man's grief was growing beside of the mirth
Of the springs and the summers that wasted their wealth ;
And the birds, the new-comers, made merry by stealth.

Yet here of old
Abode the bold ;
Nor had they wailed
Though the wheat had failed,
And the vine no more
Gave forth her store.
Yea, they found the waste good
For the fearless of mood.

Then to these, that were dwelling aloof from the Dale,
Fared the wild-wind a-telling the worst of the tale;
As men bathed in the morning they saw in the pool
The image of scorning, the throne of the fool.
The picture was gleaming in helm and in sword,
And shone forth its seeming from cups of the board.

Forth then they came
With the battle-flame;
From the Wood and the Waste
And the Dale did they haste:
They saw the storm rise,
And with untroubled eyes
The war-storm they met;
And the rain ruddy-wet.
O'er the Dale then was litten the Candle of Day,
Night-sorrow was smitten, and gloom fled away.
How the grief-shackles sunder! How many to morn
Shall awaken and wonder how gladness was born!
O wont unto sorrow, how sweet unto you
Shall be pondering to-morrow what deed is to do!

Fell many a man
'Neath the edges wan,
In the heat of the play
That fashioned the day.
Praise all ye then
The death of men,
And the gift of the aid
Of the unafraid!
O strong are the living men mighty to save,
And good is their giving, and gifts that we have!
But the dead, they that gave us once, never again;
Long and long shall they save us sore trouble and pain.
O Banner above us, O God of the strong,
Love them as ye love us that bore down our wrong!

So they sang in the Hall; and there was many a man wept, as the song ended, for those that should never see the good days of the Dale, and all the joy

that was to be; and men swore, by all that they loved, that they would never forget those that had fallen in the Winning of Silverdale; and that when each year the Cups of Memory went round, they should be no mere names to them, but the very men whom they had known and loved.

CHAPTER XLIX

DALLACH FARETH TO ROSEDALE: CROW TELLETH OF HIS ERRAND: THE KINDREDS EAT THEIR MEAT IN SILVERDALE

Now Dallach, who had gone away for a while, came back again into the Hall; and at his back were a half score of men who bore ladders with them: they were stout men, clad in scanty and ragged raiment, but girt with swords and bearing axes, those of them who were not handling the ladders. Men looked on them curiously, because they saw them to be of the roughest of the thralls. They were sullen and fierce-eyed to behold, and their hands and bare arms were flecked with blood; and it was easy to see that they had been chasing the fleers, and making them pay for their many torments of past days.

But when Face-of-god beheld this he cried out: "Ho, Dallach! is it so that thou hast bethought thee to bring in hither men to fall to the cleansing of the Hall, and to do away the defiling of the Dusky Men?"

"Even so, War-leader," said Dallach; "also ye shall know that all battle is over in Silver-stead; for the thralls fell in numbers not to be endured on the Dusky Men who had turned their backs to us, and hindered them from fleeing north. But though they

have slain many, they have not slain all, and the remnant have fled by divers ways westaway, that they may gain the wood and the ways to Rosedale; and the stoutest of the thralls are at their heels, and ever as they go fresh men from the fields join in the chase with great joy. I have gathered together of the best of them two hundreds and a half well-armed; and if thou wilt give me leave, I will get to me yet more, and follow hard on the fleers, and so get me home to Rosedale; for thither will these runaways to meet whatso of their kind may be left there. Also I would fain be there to set some order amongst the poor folk of mine own people, whom this day's work hath delivered from torment. And if thou wilt suffer a few men of the Dalesmen to come along with me, then shall all things be better done there."

"Luck go with thine hands!" said Face-of-god. "Take whomso thou wilt of the Burgdalers that have a mind to fare with thee to the number of five score; and send word of thy thriving to Folk-might, the chieftain of the Dale; as for us, meseemeth that we shall abide here no long while. How sayest thou, Folk-might, shall Dallach go?"

Then Folk-might, who stood close beside him, looked up and reddened somewhat, as a man caught heedless when he should be heedful; but he looked kindly on Face-of-god, and said:

"War-leader, so long as thou art in the Dale which ye kindreds have won back for us, thou art the chieftain, and no other, and I bid thee do as thou wilt in this matter, and in all things; and I hereby give command to all my kindred to do according to thy will everywhere and always, as they love me; and indeed I deem that thy will shall be theirs; since it is only fools who know not their well-wishers. How say ye, kinsmen?"

Then those about cried out: "Hail to Face-of-god! Hail to the Dalesmen! Hail to our friends!"

But Folk-might went up to Face-of-god, and threw his arms about him and kissed him, and he said therewithal, so that most men heard him:

"Herewith I kiss not only thee, thou goodly and glorious warrior! but this kiss and embrace is for all the men of the kindreds of the Dale and the Shepherds; since I deem that never have men more valiant dwelt upon the earth."

Therewith all men shouted for joy of him, and were exceeding glad; but Folk-might spake apart to Face-of-god and said: "Brother, I suppose that thou wilt deem it good to abide in this Hall or anigh it; for hereabouts now is the heart of the Host. But as for me, I would have leave to depart for a little; since I have an errand, whereof thou mayest wot."

Then Face-of-god smiled on him, and said: "Go, and all good go with thee; and tell my father that I would have tidings, since I may not be there." So he spake; yet in his heart was he glad that he might not go to behold the Bride lying sick and sorry. But Folk-might departed without more words; and in the door of the Hall he met Crow the Shaft-speeder, who would have spoken to him, and given him the tidings; but Folk-might said to him: "Do thine errand to the War-leader, who is within the Hall." And so went on his way.

Then came Crow up the Hall, and stood before Face-of-god and said: "War-leader, we have done that which was to be done, and have cleared all the houses about the Market-stead. Moreover, by the rede of Dallach we have set certain men of the poor folk of the Dale, who are well looked to by the others, to the burying of the slain Felons; and they be digging trenches in the fields on the north side of the Market-

stead, and carry the carcasses thither as they may. But the slain whom they find of the kindreds do they array out yonder before this Hall. In all wise are these men tame and biddable, save that they rage against the Dusky Men, though they fear them yet. As for us, they deem us Gods come down from heaven to help them. So much for what is good: now have I an ill word to say; to wit, that in the houses whereas we have found many thralls alive, yet also have we found many dead; for amongst these murder-carles were some of an evil sort, who, when they saw that the battle would go against them, rushed into the houses hewing down all before them—man, woman, and child; so that many of the halls and chambers we saw running blood like to shambles. To be short: of them whom they were going to hew to the Gods, we have found thirteen living and three dead, of which latter is one woman; and of the living, seven women; and all these, living and dead, with the leaden shackles yet on them wherein they should be burned. To all these and others whom we have found, we have done what of service we could in the way of victual and clothes, so that they scarce believe that they are on this lower earth. Moreover, I have with me two score of them, who are men of some wits, and who know of the stores of victual and other wares which the felons had, and these will fetch and carry for you as much as ye will. Is all done rightly, War-leader?"

"Right well," said Face-of-god, "and we give thee our thanks therefor. And now it were well if these thy folk were to dight our dinner for us in some green field the nighest that may be, and thither shall all the Host be bidden by sound of horn. Meantime, let us void this Hall till it be cleansed of the filth of the Dusky Ones; but hereafter shall we come again to it,

and light a fire on the Holy Hearth, and bid the Gods and the Fathers come back and behold their children sitting glad in the ancient Hall."

Then men shouted and were exceeding joyous; but Face-of-god said once more: "Bear ye a bench out into the Market-place over against the door of this Hall: thereon will I sit with other chieftains of the kindreds, that whoso will may have recourse to us."

So therewith all the men of the kindreds made their ways out of the Hall and into the Market-stead, which was by this time much cleared of the slaughtered felons; and the bale for the burnt-offering was now but smouldering, and a thin column of blue smoke was going up wavering amidst the light airs of the afternoon. Men were somewhat silent now; for they were stiff and weary with the morning's battle; and a many had been hurt withal; and on many there yet rested the after-grief of battle, and sorrow for the loss of friends and well-wishers.

For in the battle had fallen one long hundred and two of the men of the Host; and of these were two score and five of the kindreds of the Steer, the Bull, and the Bridge, who had made such valiant onslaught by the southern road. Of the Shepherds died one score save three; for though they scattered the foe at once, yet they fell on with such headlong valour, rather than wisely, that many were trapped in the throng of the Dusky Men. Of the Woodlanders were slain one score and nine; for hard had been the fight about them, and no man of them spared himself one whit. Of the men of the Wolf, who were but a few, fell sixteen men, and all save two of these in Face-of-god's battle. Of the Burgdale men whom Folk-might led, to wit, them of the Face, the Vine, and the Sickle, were but seven men slain outright. In this tale are told all those who died of their hurts after the day of battle. Therewithal

many others were sorely hurt who mended, and went about afterwards hale and hearty.

So as the folk abode in the Market-place, somewhat faint and weary, they heard horns blow up merrily, and Crow the Shaft-speeder came forth and stood on the mound of the altar, and bade men fare to dinner, and therewith he led the way, bearing in his hand the banner of the Golden Bushel, of which House he was; and they followed him into a fair and great mead on the south-west of Silver-stead, besprinkled about with ancient trees of sweet chestnut. There they found the boards spread for them with the best of victual which the poor down-trodden folk knew how to dight for them; and especially was there great plenty of good wine of the sun-smitten bents.

So they fell to their meat, and the poor folk, both men and women, served them gladly, though they were somewhat afeard of these fierce sword-wielders, the Gods who had delivered them. The said thralls were mostly not of those who had fallen so bitterly on their fleeing masters, but were men and women of the households, not so roughly treated as the others, that is to say, those who had been wont to toil under the lash in the fields and the silver-mines, and were as wild as they durst be.

As for these waiting-thralls, the men of the kindreds were gentle and blithe with them, and often as they served them would they stay their hands (and especially if they were women), and would draw down their heads to put a morsel in their mouths, or set the wine-cup to their lips; and they would stroke them and caress them, and treat them in all wise as their dear friends. Moreover, when any man was full, he would arise and take hold of one of the thralls, and set him in his place, and serve him with meat and drink, and talk with him kindly, so that the poor folk were much

bewildered with joy. And the first that arose from table were the Sun-beam and Bow-may and Hall-face, with many of the swains and the women of the Woodlanders; and they went from table to table serving the others.

The Sun-beam had done off her armour, and went about exceeding fair and lovely in her kirtle; but Bow-may yet bore her hauberk, for she loved it, and indeed it was so fine and well-wrought that it was no great burden. Albeit she had gone down with the Sun-beam and other women to a fair stream thereby, and there had they bathed and washed themselves; and Bow-may's hurts, which were not great, had been looked to and bound up afresh, and she had come to table unhelmed, with a wreath of wind-flowers round her head.

There then they feasted; and their hearts were strengthened by the meat and drink; and if sorrow were blended with their joy, yet were they high-hearted through both joy and sorrow, looking forward to the good days to be in the Dales at the Roots of the Mountains, and the love and fellowship of Folks and of Houses.

But as for Face-of-god, he went not to the meadow, but abode sitting on the bench in the Market-place, where were none else now of the kindreds save the appointed warders. They had brought him a morsel and a cup of wine, and he had eaten and drunk; and now he sat there with Dale-warden lying sheathed across his knees, and seeming to gaze on the thralls of Silverdale busied in carrying away the bodies of the slain felons, after they had stripped them of their raiment and weapons. Yet indeed all this was before his eyes as a picture which he noted not. Rather he sat pondering many things; wondering at his being there in Silverdale in the hour of victory; longing for the peace of Burgdale

and the bride-chamber of the Sun-beam. Then went his thought out toward his old playmate lying hurt in Silverdale; and his heart was grieved because of her, yet not for long, though his thought still dwelt on her; since he deemed that she would live and presently be happy—and happy thenceforward for many years. So pondered Face-of-god in the Market-place of Silverdale.

CHAPTER L

FOLK-MIGHT SEETH THE BRIDE AND SPEAKETH WITH HER

Now tells the tale of Folk-might, that he went his ways from the Hall to the house where the Bride lay; and the swain who had brought the message went along with him, and he was proud of walking beside so mighty a warrior, and he talked to Folk-might as they went; and the sound of his voice was irksome to the chieftain, but he made as though he hearkened. Yet when they came to the door of the house, which was just out of the Place on the Southern road (for thereby had the Bride fallen to earth), he could withhold his grief no longer, but turned on the threshold and laid his head on the door-jamb, and sobbed and wept till the tears fell down like rain. And the boy stood by wondering, and wishing that Folk-might would forbear weeping, but durst not speak to him.

In a while Folk-might left weeping and went in, and found a fair hall sore befouled by the felons, and in the corner on a bed covered with furs the wounded woman; and at first sight he deemed her not so pale as he looked to see her, as she lay with her long dark-red hair strewed over the pillow, her head moving

about wearily. A linen cloth was thrown over her body, but her arms lay out of it before her. Beside her sat the Alderman, his face sober enough, but not as one in heavy sorrow; and anigh him was another chair as if someone had but just got up from it. There was no one else in the hall save two women of the Woodlanders, one of whom was cooking some potion on the hearth, and another was sweeping the floor anigh of bran or some such stuff, which had been thrown down to sop up the blood.

So Folk-might went up to the Bride, sorely dreading the image of death which she had grown to be, and sorely loving the woman she was and would be.

He knelt down by the bedside, heeding Iron-face little, though he nodded friendly to him, and he held his face close to hers; but she had her eyes shut and did not open them till he had been there a little while; and then they opened and fixed themselves on his without surprise or change. Then she lifted her right hand (for it was in her left shoulder and side that she had been hurt) and slowly laid it on his head, and drew his face to hers and kissed it fondly, as she both smiled and let the tears run over from her eyes. Then she spake in a weak voice:

"Thou seest, chieftain, and dear friend, that I may not stand by thy victorious side to-day. And now, though I were fain if thou wouldst never leave me, yet needs must thou go about thy work, since thou art become the Alderman of the Folk of Silverdale. Yea, and even if thou wert not to go from me, yet in a manner should I go from thee. For I am grievously hurt, and I know by myself, and also the leeches have told me, that the fever is a-coming on me; so that presently I shall not know thee, but may deem thee to be a woman, or a hound, or the very Wolf that is the image of the Father of thy kindred; or

even, it may be, someone else—that I have played with time agone."

Her voice faltered and faded out here, and she was silent a while; then she said:

"So depart, kind friend and dear love, bearing this word with thee, that should I die, I call on Iron-face my kinsman to bear witness that I bid thee carry me to bale in Silverdale, and lay mine ashes with the ashes of thy Fathers, with whom thine own shall mingle at the last, since I have been of the warriors who have helped to bring thee aback to the land of thy folk."

Then she smiled and shut her eyes and said: "And if I live, as indeed I hope, and how glad and glad I shall be to live, then shalt thou bring me to thy house and thy bed, that I may not depart from thee while both our lives last."

And she opened her eyes and looked at him; and he might not speak for a while, so ravished as he was betwixt joy and sorrow. But the Alderman arose and took a gold ring from off his arm, and spake:

"This is the gold ring of the God of the Face, and I bear it on mine arm betwixt the Folk and the God in all man-motes, and I bore it through the battle to-day; and it is as holy a ring as may be; and since ye are plighting troth, and I am the witness thereof, it were good that ye held this ring together and called the God to witness, who is akin to the God of the Earth, as we all be. Take the ring, Folk-might, for I trust thee; and of all women now alive would I have this woman happy."

So Folk-might took the ring and thrust his hand through it, and took her hand, and said:

"Ye Fathers, thou God of the Face, thou Earth-god, thou Warrior, bear witness that my life and my body are plighted to this woman, the Bride of the House of the Steer!"

His face was flushed and bright as he spoke, but as his words ceased he noted how feebly her hand lay in his, and his face fell, and he gazed on her timidly. But she lay quiet, and said softly and slowly:

"O Fathers of my kindred! O Warrior and God of the Earth! bear witness that I plight my troth to this man, to lie in his grave if I die, and in his bed if I live."

And she smiled on him again, and then closed her eyes; but opened them presently once more, and said:

"Dear friend, how fared it with Gold-mane to-day?"

Said Folk-might: "So well he did, that none might have done better. He fared in the fight as if he had been our Father the Warrior: he is a great chieftain."

She said: "Wilt thou give him this message from me, that in no wise he forget the oath which he swore upon the finger-ring as it lay on the sundial of the Garden of the Face? And say, moreover, that I am sorry that we shall part, and have between us such breadth of wild-wood and mountain-neck."

"Yea, surely will I give thy message," said Folk-might; and in his heart he rejoiced, because he heard her speak as if she were sure of life. Then she said faintly:

"It is now thy work to depart from me, and to do as it behoveth a chieftain of the people and the Alderman of Silverdale. Depart, lest the leeches chide me: farewell, my dear!"

So he laid his face to hers and kissed her, and rose up and embraced Iron-face, and went his ways without looking back.

But just over the threshold he met old Hall-ward of the House of the Steer, who was at point to enter, and he greeted him kindly. The old man looked on him steadily, and said: "To-morrow or the day after I will utter a word to thee, O Chief of the Wolf."

"In a good hour," said Folk-might, "for all thy words are true."

Therewith he gat him away from the house, and came to Face-of-god, where he sat before the altar of the Crooked Sword; and now were the chiefs come back from their meat, and were sitting with him; there also were Wood-father and Wood-wont; but Bow-may was with the Sun-beam, who was resting softly in the fair meadow after all the turmoil.

So men made place for Folk-might beside the War-leader, who looked upon his face, and saw that it was sober and unsmiling, but not heavy or moody with grief. So he deemed that all was as well as it might be with the Bride, and with a good heart fell to taking counsel with the others; and kindly and friendly were the redes which they held there, with no gain-saying of man by man, for the whole folk was glad at heart.

So there they ordered all matters duly for that present time, and by then they had made an end, it was past sunset, and men were lodged in the chief houses about the Market-stead.

Albeit, though they ate their meat with all joy of heart, and were merry in converse one with the other, the men of the Wolf would by no means feast in their Hall again till it had been cleansed and hallowed anew.

CHAPTER LI

THE DEAD BORNE TO BALE: THE MOTE-HOUSE RE-HALLOWED

On the morrow they bore to bale their slain men, and therewithal what was left of the bodies of the four

chieftains of the Great Undoing. They brought them into a most fair meadow to the west of Silver-stead, where they had piled up a very great bale for the burning. In that meadow was the Doom-ring and Thing-stead of the Folk of the Wolf, and they had hallowed it when they had first conquered Silverdale, and it was deemed far holier than the Mote-house aforesaid, wherein the men of the kindred might hold no due court; but rather it was a Feast-hall, and a house where men had converse together, and wherein precious things and tokens of the Fathers were stored up.

The Thing-stead in the meadow was flowery and well-grassed, and a little stream winding about thereby nearly cast a ring around it; and beyond the stream was a full fair grove of oak-trees, very tall and ancient. There then they burned the dead of the Host, wrapped about in exceeding fair raiment. And when the ashes were gathered, the men of Burgdale and the Shepherds left those of their folk for the kindred to bury there in Silverdale; for they said that they had a right to claim such guesting for them that had helped to win back the Dale.

But when the Burning was done and the bale quenched, and the ashes gathered and buried (and that was on the morrow), then men bore forth the Banners of the Jaws of the Wolf, and the Red Hand, and the Silver Arm, and the Golden Bushel, and the Ragged Sword, and the Wolf of the Woodland; and with great joy and triumph they brought them into the Mote-house and hung them up over the dais; and they kindled fire on the Holy Hearth by holding up a disk of bright glass to the sun; and then they sang before the banners. And this is somewhat of the song that they sang before them:

Why are ye wending? O whence and whither?
What shineth over the fallow swords?
What is the joy that ye bear in hither?
What is the tale of your blended words?

No whither we wend, but here have we stayed us,
Here by the ancient Holy Hearth;
Long have the moons and the years delayed us,
But here are we come from the heart of the dearth.

We are the men of joy belated;
We are the wanderers over the waste;
We are but they that sat and waited,
Watching the empty winds make haste.

Long, long we sat and knew no others,
Save alien folk and the foes of the road;
Till late and at last we met our brothers,
And needs must we to the old abode.

For once on a day they prayed for guesting;
And how were we then their bede to do?
Wild was the waste for the people's resting,
And deep the wealth of the Dale we knew.

Here were the boards that we must spread them
Down in the fruitful Dale and dear;
Here were the halls where we would bed them:
And how should we tarry otherwhere?

Over the waste we came together:
There was the tangle athwart the way;
There was the wind-storm and the weather;
The red rain darkened down the day.

But that day of the days what grief should let us,
When we saw through the clouds the dale-glad sun?
We tore at the tangle that beset us,
And stood at peace when the day was done.

Hall of the Happy, take our greeting!
   Bid thou the Fathers come and see
The Folk-signs on thy walls a-meeting,
   And deem to-day what men we be.

Look on the Holy Hearth new-litten,
   How the sparks fly twinkling up aloof!
How the wavering smoke by the sunlight smitten,
   Curls up around the beam-rich roof!

For here once more is the Wolf abiding,
   Nor ever more from the Dale shall wend,
And never again his head be hiding,
   Till all days be dark and the world have end.

CHAPTER LII

OF THE NEW BEGINNING OF GOOD DAYS IN SILVERDALE

On the third day there was high-tide and great joy amongst all men from end to end of the Dale; and the delivered thralls were feasted and made much of by the kindreds, so that they scarce knew how to believe their own five senses that told them the good tidings.

For none strove to grieve them and torment them; what they would, that did they, and they had all things plenteously; since for all was there enough and to spare of goods stored up for the Dusky Men, as corn and wine and oil and spices, and raiment and silver. Horses were there also, and neat and sheep and swine in abundance. Withal there was the good and dear land; the waxing corn on the acres; the blossoming vines on the hill-side; and about the orchards and alongside the ways, the plum-trees and cherry-trees and pear-trees that had cast their blossom and were overhung with little young fruit; and the fair apple-trees

a-blossoming, and the chestnuts spreading their boughs from their twisted trunks over the green grass. And there was the goodly pasture for the horses and the neat, and the thymy hill-grass for the sheep; and beyond it all, the thicket of the great wood, with its unfailing store of goodly timber of ash and oak and holly and yoke-elm. There need no man lack unless man compelled him, and all was rich enough and wide enough for the waxing of a very great folk.

Now, therefore, men betook them to what was their own before the coming of the Dusky Men; and though at first many of the delivered thrall-folk feasted somewhat above measure, and though there were some of them who were not very brisk at working on the earth for their livelihood; yet were the most part of them quick of wit and deft of hand, and they mostly fell to presently at their cunning, both of husbandry and handicraft. Moreover, they had great love of the kindreds, and especially of the Woodlanders, and strove to do all things that might pleasure them. And as for those who were dull and listless because of their many torments of the last ten years, they would at least fetch and carry willingly for them of the kindreds; and these last grudged them not meat and raiment and house-room, even if they wrought but little for it, because they called to mind the evil days of their thralldom, and bethought them how few are men's days upon the earth.

Thus all things throve in Silverdale, and the days wore on toward the summer, and the Yule-tide rest beyond it, and the years beyond and far beyond the winning of Silverdale.

CHAPTER LIII

OF THE WORD WHICH HALL-WARD OF THE STEER HAD FOR FOLK-MIGHT

But of the time then passing, it is to be said that the whole host abode in Silverdale in great mirth and good liking, till they should hear tidings of Dallach and his company, who had followed hot-foot on the fleers of the Dusky Men. And on the tenth day after the battle, Iron-face and his two sons and Stone-face were sitting about sunset under a great oak-tree by that stream-side which ran through the Mote-stead; there also was Folk-might, somewhat distraught because of his love for the Bride, who was now mending of her hurts. As they sat there in all content they saw folk coming toward them, three in number, and as they drew nigher they saw that it was old Hall-ward of the Steer, and the Sun-beam and Bow-may following him hand in hand.

When they came to the brook Bow-may ran up to the elder to help him over the stepping-stones; which she did as one who loved him, as the old man was stark enough to have waded the water waist-deep. She was no longer in her war-gear, but was clad after her wont of Shadowy Vale, in nought but a white woollen kirtle. So she stood in the stream beside the stones, and let the swift water ripple up over her ankles, while the elder leaned on her shoulder and looked down upon her kindly. The Sun-beam followed after them, stepping daintily from stone to stone, so that she was a fair sight to see; her face was smiling and happy, and as she stepped forth on to the green

grass the colour flushed up in it, but she cast her eyes adown as one somewhat shamefaced.

So the chieftains rose up before the leader of the Steer, and Folk-might went up to him, and greeted him, and took his hand and kissed him on the cheek. And Hall-ward said:

"Hail to the chiefs of the kindred, and my earthly friends!"

Then Folk-might bade him sit down by him, and all the men sat down again; but the Sun-beam leaned her back against a sapling ash hard by, her feet set close together; and Bow-may went to and fro in short turns, keeping well within ear-shot.

Then said Hall-ward: "Folk-might, I have prayed thy kinswoman Bow-may to lead me to thee, that I might speak with thee; and it is good that I find my kinsmen of the Face in thy company; for I would say a word to thee that concerns them somewhat."

Said Folk-might: "Guest, and warrior of the Steer, thy words are ever good; and if this time thou comest to ask aught of me, then shall they be better than good."

Said Hall-ward: "Tell me, Folk-might, hast thou seen my daughter the Bride to-day?"

"Yea," said Folk-might, reddening.

"What didst thou deem of her state?" said Hall-ward.

Said Folk-might: "Thou knowest thyself that the fever hath left her, and that she is mending."

Hall-ward said: "In a few days belike we shall be wending home to Burgdale: when deemest thou that the Bride may travel, if it were but on a litter?"

Folk-might was silent, and Hall-ward smiled on him and said: "Wouldst thou have her tarry, O chief of the Wolf?"

"So it is," said Folk-might, "that it might be labour lost for her to journey to Burgdale at present."

"Thinkest thou?" said Hall-ward; "hast thou a mind then that if she goeth she shall speedily come back hither?"

"It has been in my mind," said Folk-might, "that I should wed her. Wilt thou gainsay it? I pray thee, Iron-face my friend, and ye Stone-face and Hall-face, and thou, Face-of-god, my brother, to lay thy words to mine in this matter."

Then said Hall-ward stroking his beard: "There will be a seat missing in the Hall of the Steer, and a sore lack in the heart of many a man in Burgdale if the Bride come back to us no more. We looked not to lose the maiden by her wedding; for it is no long way betwixt the House of the Steer and the House of the Face. But now, when I arise in the morning and miss her, I shall take my staff and walk down the street of Burgstead; for I shall say, The Maiden hath gone to see Iron-face my friend; she is well in the House of the Face. And then shall I remember how that the wood and the wastes lie between us. How sayest thou, Alderman?"

"A sore lack it will be," said Iron-face; "but all good go with her! Though whiles shall I go hatless down Burgstead street, and say, Now will I go fetch my daughter the Bride from the House of the Steer; while many a day's journey shall lie betwixt us."

Said Hall-ward: "I will not beat about the bush, Folk-might; what gift wilt thou give us for the maiden?"

Said Folk-might: "Whatever is mine shall be thine; and whatsoever of the Dale the kindred and the poor folk begrudge thee not, that shalt thou have; and deemest thou that they will begrudge thee aught? Is it enough?"

Hall-ward said: "I wot not, chieftain; see thou to it! Bow-may, my friend, bring hither that which I would have from Silverdale for the House of the Steer in payment for our maiden."

Then Bow-may came forward speedily, and went up to the Sun-beam, and led her by the hand in front of Folk-might and Hall-ward and the other chieftains. Then Folk-might started, and leapt up from the ground; for, sooth to say, he had been thinking so wholly of the Bride, that his sister was not in his mind, and he had had no deeming of whither Hall-ward was coming, though the others guessed well enough, and now smiled on him merrily, when they saw how wild Folk-might stared. As for the Sun-beam, she stood there blushing like a rose in June, but looking her brother straight in the face, as Hall-ward said:

"Folk-might, chief of the Wolf, since thou wouldst take our maiden the Bride away from us, I ask thee to make good her place with this maiden; so that the House of the Steer may not lack, when they who are wont to wed therein come to us and pray us for a bedfellow for the best of their kindred."

Then became Folk-might smiling and merry like unto the others, and he said: "Chief of the Steer, this gift is thine, together with aught else which thou mayst desire of us."

Then he kissed the Sun-beam, and said: "Sister, we looked for this to befall in some fashion. Yet we deemed that he that should lead thee away might abide with us for a moon or two. But now let all this be, since if thou art not to bear children to the kindreds of Silverdale, yet shalt thou bear them to their friends and fellows. And now choose what gift thou wilt have of us to keep us in thy memory."

She said: "The memory of my people shall not

fade from me; yet indeed I ask thee for a gift, to wit, Bow-may, and the two sons of Wood-father that are left since Wood-wicked was slain; and belike the elder and his wife will be fain to go with their sons, and ye will not hinder them."

"Even so shall it be done," said Folk-might, and he was silent a while, pondering; and then he said:

"Lo you, friends! doth it not seem strange to you that peace sundereth as well as war? Indeed I deem it grievous that ye shall have to miss your well-beloved kinswoman. And for me, I am now grown so used to this woman my sister, though at whiles she hath been masterful with me, that I shall often turn about and think to speak to her, when there lie long days of wood and waste betwixt her voice and mine."

The Sun-beam laughed in his face, though the tears stood in her eyes, as she said: "Keep up thine heart, brother; for at least the way is shorter betwixt Burgdale and Silverdale than betwixt life and death; and the road we shall learn belike."

Said Hall-face: "So it is that my brother is no ill woodman, as ye learned last autumn."

Iron-face smiled, but somewhat sadly; for he beheld Face-of-god, who had no eyes for anyone save the Sun-beam; and no marvel was that, for never had she looked fairer. And forsooth the War-leader was not utterly well-pleased; for he was deeming that there would be delaying of his wedding, now that the Sun-beam was to become a maid of the Steer; and in his mind he half deemed that it would be better if he were to take her by the hand and lead her home through the wild-wood, he and she alone; and she looked on him shyly, as though she had a deeming of his thought. Albeit he knew it might not be, that he, the chosen War-leader, should trouble the peace of the kindred; for he wotted that all this was done for peace' sake.

So Hall-ward stood forth and took the Sun-beam's right hand in his, and said:

"Now do I take this maiden, Sun-beam of the kindred of the Wolf, and lead her into the House of the Steer, to be in all ways one of the maidens of our House, and to wed in the blood wherein we have been wont to wed. Neither from henceforth let anyone say that this woman is not of the blood of the Steer; for we have given her our blood, and she is of us duly and truly."

Thereafter they talked together merrily for a little, and then turned toward the houses, for the sun was now down; and as they went Iron-face spake to his son, and said:

"Gold-mane, wilt thou verily keep thine oath to wed the fairest woman in the world? By how much is this one fairer than my dear daughter who shall no more dwell in mine house?"

Said Face-of-god: "Yea, father, I shall keep mine oath; for the Gods, who know much, know that when I swore last Yule I was thinking of the fair woman going yonder beside Hall-ward, and of none other."

"Ah, son!" said Iron-face, "why didst thou beguile us? Hadst thou but told us the truth then!"

"Yea, Alderman," said Face-of-god smiling, "and how thou wouldest have raged against me then, when thou hast scarce forgiven me now! In sooth, father, I feared to tell you all: I was young; I was one against the world. Yea, yea; and even that was sweet to me, so sorely as I loved her—Hast thou forgotten, father?"

Iron-face smiled, and answered not; and so came they to the house wherein they were guested.

CHAPTER LIV

TIDINGS OF DALLACH: A FOLK-MOTE IN SILVERDALE

Three days thereafter came two swift runners from Rosedale with tidings of Dallach. In all wise had he thriven, and had slain many of the runaways, and had come happily to Rosedale: therein by the mere shaking of their swords had they all their will; for there were but a few of the Dusky Warriors in the Dale, since the more part had fared to the slaughter in Silver-stead. Now therefore had Dallach been made Alderman of Rosedale; and the Burgdalers who had gone with him should abide the coming thither of the rest of the Burgdale Host, and meantime of their coming should uphold the new Alderman in Rosedale. Howbeit Dallach sent word that it was not to be doubted but that many of the Dusky Men had escaped to the woods, and should yet be the death of many a mother's son, unless it were well looked to.

And now the more part of the Burgdale men and the Shepherds began to look toward home, albeit some amongst them had not been ill-pleased to abide there yet a while; for life was exceeding soft to them there, though they helped the poor folk gladly in their husbandry. For especially the women of the Dale, of whom many were very goodly, hankered after the fair-faced tall Burgdalers, and were as kind to them as might be. Forsooth not a few, both carles and queens, of the old thrall-folk prayed them of Burgdale to take them home thither, that they might see new things and forget their old torments once for all, yea, even in dreams. The Burgdalers would not gainsay them, and there was no one else to hinder; so that there went with the Burgdale men at their departure

hard on five score of the Silverdale folk who were not of the kindreds.

And now was a great Folk-mote holden in Silverdale, whereto the Burgdale men and the Shepherds were bidden; and thereat the War-leader gave out the morrow of the morrow for the day of the departure of the Host. There also were the matters of Silverdale duly ordered: the Men of the Wolf would have had the Woodlanders dwell with them in the fair-builded stead, and take to them of the goodly stone houses there what they would; but this they naysaid, choosing rather to dwell in scattered houses, which they built for themselves at the utmost limit of the tillage.

Indeed, the most abode not even there a long while; for they loved the wood and its deeds. So they went forth into the wood, and cleared them space to dwell in, and builded them halls such as they loved, and fell to their old woodland crafts of charcoal-burning and hunting, wherein they throve well. And good for Silverdale was their abiding there, since they became a sure defence and stout outpost against all foemen. For the rest, wheresoever they dwelt, they were guest-cherishing and blithe, and were well beloved by all people; and they wedded with the other Houses of the Children of the Wolf.

As to the other matters whereof they took rede at this Folk-mote, they had mostly to do with the warding of the Dale, and the learning of the delivered thralls to handle weapons duly. For men deemed it most like that they would have to meet other men of the kindred of the Felons; which indeed fell out as the years wore.

Moreover, Folk-might (by the rede of Stone-face) sent messengers to the Plain and the Cities, unto men whom he knew there, doing them to wit of the tidings

of Silverdale, and how that a peaceful and guest-loving people, having good store of wares, now dwelt therein, so that chapmen might have recourse thither.

Lastly spake Folk-might and said:

"Guests and brothers-in-arms, we have been looking about our new house, which was our old one, and therein we find great store of wares which we need not, and which we can but use if ye use them. Of your kindness therefore we pray you to take of those things what ye can easily carry. And if ye say the way is long, as indeed it is, since ye are bent on going through the wood to Rosedale, and so on to Burgdale, yet shall we furnish you with beasts to bear your goods, and with such wains as may pass through the woodland ways."

Then rose up Fox of Upton and said: "O Folk-might, and ye men of the Wolf, be it known unto you, that if we have done anything for your help in the winning of Silverdale, we have thus done that we might help ourselves also, so that we might live in peace henceforward, and that we might have your friendship and fellowship therewithal, so that here in Silverdale might wax a mighty folk who joined unto us should be strong enough to face the whole world. Such are the redes of wise men when they go a-warring. But we have no will to go back home again made rich with your wealth; this hath been far from our thought in this matter."

And there went up a murmur from all the Burgdalers yeasaying his word.

But Folk-might took up the word again and spake:

"Men of Burgdale and the Sheepcotes, what ye say is both manly and friendly; yet, since we look to see a road made plain through the woodland betwixt Burgdale and Silverdale, and that often ye shall face us in the feast-hall, and whiles stand beside us in the fray, we must needs pray you not to shame us by

departing empty-handed; for how then may we look upon your faces again? Stone-face, my friend, thou art old and wise; therefore I bid thee to help us herein, and speak for us to thy kindred, that they naysay us not in this matter."

Then stood up Stone-face and said: "Forsooth, friends, Folk-might is in the right herein; for he may look for anger from the wights that come and go betwixt his kindred and the Gods, if they see us faring back giftless through the woods. Moreover, now that ye have seen Silverdale, ye may wot how rich a land it is of all good things, and able to bring forth enough and to spare. And now meseemeth the Gods love this Folk that shall dwell here; and they shall become a mighty Folk, and a part of our very selves. Therefore let us take the gifts of our friends, and thank them blithely. For surely, as saith Folk-might, henceforth the wood shall become a road betwixt us, and the thicket a halting-place for friends bearing goodwill in their hands."

When he had spoken, men yeasaid his words and forbore the gifts no longer; and the Folk-mote sundered in all loving-kindness.

CHAPTER LV

DEPARTURE FROM SILVERDALE

On the morrow of the morrow were the Burgdale men and they of the Shepherds gathered together in the Market-stead early in the morning, and they were all ready for departure; and the men of the Wolf and the Woodlanders, and of the delivered thralls a great many, stood round about them grieving that they must go. There was much talk between the folk of the Dale and the Guests, and many promises were given

and taken to come and go betwixt the two Dales. There also were the men of the thrall-folk who were to wend home with the Burgdalers; and they had been stuffed with good things by the men of the kindreds, and were as fain as might be.

As for the Sun-beam, she was somewhat out of herself at first, being eager and restless beyond her wont, and yet at whiles weeping-ripe when she called to mind that she was now leaving all those things, the gain whereof had been a dream to her both waking and sleeping for these years past. But at last, as she stood in the door of the Mote-house, and beheld all the throng of folk happy and friendly, it came over her that she herself had done her full share to bring all this about, and that all those pleasant places of Silverdale now full of the goodly life of man would be there even as she had striven for them, and that they would be a part of her left behind, though she were dwelling otherwhere.

Therewithal she said to herself that it was now her part to wield the life of men in Burgdale, and begin once more her days of a chieftain and a swayer of the Folk, and the life of a stirring woman, which the edge of the sword and the need of the hard hand-play had taken out of her hands for a while, making her as a child in the hands of the strong wielders of the blades.

So now she became calm once more, and her face was clad again with the full measure of that majesty of beauty which had once overawed Face-of-god amidst his love of her; and folk beheld her and marvelled at her fairness, and said: "She hath an inward sorrow at leaving the fair Dale wherein her Fathers dwelt, and where her mother's ashes lie in earth." Albeit now was her sorrow but little, and much was her hope, and her foresight of days to be; though all the Dale, yea, every leaf and twig of it

whereby her feet had ever passed, and each stone of the fair houses, was to her as a picture that she could look on from henceforth for ever.

Of the Bride it is to be said that she was now much mended, and she caused men bear her on a litter out into the Market-place, that she might look on the departure of her folk. She had seen Face-of-god once and again since the Day of Battle, and each time had been kind and blithe with him; and for Iron-face, she loved him so well that she was ever loth to let him depart from her, save when Folk-might was with her.

And now was the Alderman standing beside her, and she said to him: "Friend and kinsman, this is the day of departure, and though I must needs abide behind, and am content to abide, yet doth mine heart ache with the sundering; for to-morrow when I wake in the morning there will be no more sending of a messenger to fetch thee to me. Indeed, great hath been the love between me and my people, and nought hath come between us to mar it. Now, kinsman, I would see Gold-mane, my cousin, that I may bid him farewell; for who knoweth if I shall see him again hereafter?"

Then went Iron-face and found Face-of-god where he was speaking with Folk-might and the chieftains, and said to him: "Come quickly, for thy cousin the Bride would speak with thee."

Face-of-god reddened, and paled afterwards, but he went along with his father silently; and his heart beat as he came and stood before the litter whereas the Bride lay, clad all in white and propped up on fair cushions of red silk. She was frail to look on, and worn and pale yet; but he deemed that she was very happy.

She smiled on him, and reached out her hand and said: "Welcome once more, cousin!" And he held her

hand and kissed it, and was nigh weeping, so sore was he beset by a throng of memories concerning her and him in the days when they were little; and he bethought him of her loving-kindness of past days, beyond that of most children, beyond that of most maidens; and how there was nothing in his life but she had a share in it, till the day when he found the Hall on the Mountain.

So he said to her: "Kinswoman, is it well with thee?"

"Yea," she said, "I am now nigh whole of my hurts."

He was silent a while; then he said:

"And otherwise art thou merry at heart?"

"Yea, indeed," said she; "yet thou wilt not find it hard to deem that I am sorry of the sundering betwixt me and Burgdale."

Again was he silent, and said in a while: "Dost thou deem that I wrought that sundering?"

She smiled kindly on him and said: "Gold-mane, my playmate, thou art become a mighty warrior and a great chief; but thou art not so mighty as that. Many things lay behind the sundering which were neither thou nor I."

"Yet," said he, "it was but such a little time agone that all things seemed so sure; and we—to both of us was the outlook happy."

"Let it be happy still," she said, "now begrudging is gone. Belike the sundering came because we were so sure, and had no defence against the wearing of the days; even as it fareth with a folk that hath no foes."

He smiled and said: "Even as it hath befallen *thy* folk, O Bride, a while ago."

She reddened, and reached her hand to him, and he took it and held it, and said: "Shall I see thee again as the days wear?"

Said she: "O chieftain of the Folk, thou shalt have much to do in Burgdale, and the way is long. Yet would I have thee see my children. Forget not the token on my hand which thou holdest. But now get thee to thy folk with no more words; for after all, playmate, the sundering is grievous to me, and I would not spin out the time thereof. Farewell!"

He said no more, but stooped down and kissed her lips, and then turned from her, and took his ways to the head of the Host, and fell to asking and answering, and bidding and arraying; and in a little time was his heart dancing with joy to think of the days that lay before him, wherein now all seemed happy.

So was all arrayed for departure when it lacked three hours of noon. As Folk-might had promised, there were certain light wains drawn by bullocks abiding the departure of the Host, and of sumpter bulls and horses no few; and all these were laden with fair gifts of the Dale, as silver, and raiment, and weapons. There were many things fair-wrought in the time of the Sorrow, that henceforth should see but little sorrow. Moreover, there was plenty of provision for the way, both meal and wine, and sheep and neat; and all things as fair as might be, and well-arrayed.

It was the Shepherds who were to lead the way; and after them were arrayed the men of the Vine and the Sickle; then they of the Steer, the Bridge, and the Bull; and lastly the House of the Face, with old Stone-face leading them. The Sun-beam was to journey along with the House of the Steer, which had taken her in as a maiden of their blood; and though she had so much liefer have fared with the House of the Face, yet she went meekly as she was bidden, as one who has gotten a great thing, and will make no stir about a small one.

Along with her were Wood-father and Wood-mother,

and Wood-wise, now whole of his hurt, and Wood-wont, and Bow-may. Save Bow-may, they were not very joyous; for they were fain of Silverdale, and it irked them to leave it; moreover, they also had liefer have gone along with the House of the War-leader.

Last of all went those people of the once thralls of the Dusky Men who had cast in their lot with the Burgdalers, and they were exceeding merry; and especially the women of them, they were chattering like the stares in the autumn evening, when they gather from the fields in the tall elm-trees before they go to roost.

Now all the men of the Dale, both of the kindreds and of the thrall-folk, made way for the Host and its havings, that they might go their ways down the Dale; albeit the Woodlanders clung close to the line of their ancient friends, and with them, as men who were sorry for the sundering, were Wolf-stone and God-swain and Spear-fist. But the chiefs, they drew around Folk-might a little beside the way.

Now Red-coat of Waterless, who had been hurt, and was now whole again, cast his arms about Folk-might and kissed him, and said:

"All the way hence to Burgdale will I sow with good wishes for thee and thine, and especially for my dear friend God-swain of the Silver Arm; and I would wish and long that they might turn into spells to draw thy feet to usward; for we love thee well."

In likewise spake other of the Burgdalers; and Folk-might was kind and blithe with them, and he said:

"Friends, forget ye not that the way is no longer from you to us than it is from us to you. One half of this matter it is for you to deal with."

"True is that," said Red-beard of the Knolls, "but

look you, Folk-might, we be but simple husbandmen, and may not often stir from our meadows and acres; even now I bethink me that May is amidst us, and I am beginning to be drawn by the thought of the haysel. Whereas thou—" (and therewith he reddened) "I doubt that thou hast little to do save the work of chieftains, and we know that such work is but little missed if it be undone."

Thereat Folk-might laughed; and when the others saw that he laughed, they laughed also, else had they foreborne for courtesy's sake.

But Folk-might answered: "Nay, chief of the Sickle, I am not altogether a chieftain, now we have gotten us peace; and somewhat of a husbandman shall I be. Moreover, doubt ye not that I shall do my utmost to behold the fair Dale again; for it is but mountains that meet not."

Now spake Face-of-god to Folk-might, smiling and somewhat softly, and said: "Is all forgiven now, since the day when we first felt each other's arms?"

"Yea, all," said Folk-might; "now hath befallen what I foretold thee in Shadowy Vale, that thou mightest pay for all that had come and gone, if thou wouldest but look to it. Indeed thou wert angry with me for that saying on that eve of Shadowy Vale; but see thou, in those days I was an older man than thou, and might admonish thee somewhat; but now, though but few days have gone over thine head, yet many deeds have abided in thine hand, and thou art much aged. Anger hath left thee, and wisdom hath waxed in thee. As for me, I may now say this word: May the Folk of Burgdale love the Folk of Silverdale as well as I love thee; then shall all be well."

Then Face-of-god cast his arms about him and kissed him, and turned away toward Stone-face and Hall-face his brother, where they stood at the head

of the array of the Face; and even therewith came up the Alderman somewhat sad and sober of countenance, and he pushed by the War-leader roughly and would not speak with him.

And now blew up the horns of the Shepherds, and they began to move on amidst the shouting of the men of Silverdale; yet were there amongst the Woodlanders those who wept when they saw their friends verily departing from them.

But when they of the foremost of the Host were gotten so far forward that the men of the Face could begin to move, lo! there was Redesman with his fiddle amongst the leaders; and he had done a man's work in the day of battle, and all looked kindly on him. About him on this morn were some who had learned the craft of singing well together, and knew his minstrelsy, and he turned to these and nodded as their array moved on, and he drew his bow across the strings, and straightway they fell a-singing, even as it might be thus:

Back again to the dear Dale where born was the kindred,
  Here wend we all living, and liveth our mirth.
Here afoot fares our joyance, whatever men hindered,
  Through all wrath of the heavens, all storms of the earth.

O true, we have left here a part of our treasure,
  The ashes of stout ones, the stems of the shield;
But the bold lives they spended have sown us new pleasure,
  Fair tales for the telling in fold and on field.

For as oft as we sing of their edges' upheaving,
  When the yellowing windows shine forth o'er the night,
Their names unforgotten with song interweaving
  Shall draw forth dear drops from the depths of delight.

Or when down by our feet the grey sickles are lying,
  And behind us is curling the supper-tide smoke,
No whit shall they grudge us the joyance undying,
  Remembrance of men that put from us the yoke.

When the huddle of ewes from the fells we have driven,
  And we see down the Dale the grey reach of the roof,
We shall tell of the gift in the battle-joy given,
  All the fierceness of friends that drave sorrow aloof.

Once then we lamented, and mourned them departed;
  Once only, no oftener. Henceforth shall we fling
Their names up aloft, when the merriest hearted
  To the Fathers unseen of our life-days we sing.

Then was there silence in the ranks of men; and many murmured the names of the fallen as they fared on their way from out the Market-place of Silver-stead. Then once more Redesman and his mates took up the song:

Come tell me, O friends, for whom bideth the maiden
  Wet-foot from the river-ford down in the Dale?
For whom hath the goodwife the ox-waggon laden
  With the babble of children, brown-handed and hale?

Come tell me for what are the women abiding,
  Till each on the other aweary they lean?
Is it loitering of evil that thus they are chiding,
  The slow-footed bearers of sorrow unseen?

Nay, yet were they toiling if sorrow had worn them,
  Or hushed had they bided with lips parched and wan.
The birds of the air other tidings have borne them—
  How glad through the wood goeth man beside man.

Then fare forth, O valiant, and loiter no longer
  Than the cry of the cuckoo when May is at hand;
Late waxeth the spring-tide, and daylight grows longer,
  And nightly the star-street hangs high o'er the land.

Many lives, many days for the Dale do ye carry;
  When the Host breaketh out from the thicket unshorn,
It shall be as the sun that refuseth to tarry
  On the crown of all mornings, the Midsummer morn.

Again the song fell down till they were well on the western way down Silverdale; and then Redesman handled his fiddle once more, and again the song rose up, and such-like were the words which were borne back into the Market-place of Silver-stead:

And yet what is this, and why fare ye so slowly,
  While our echoing halls of our voices are dumb,
And abideth unlitten the hearth-brand the holy,
  And the feet of the kind fare afield till we come?

For not yet through the wood and its tangle ye wander;
  Now skirt we no thicket, no path by the mere;
Far aloof for our feet leads the Dale-road out yonder;
  Full fair is the morning, its doings all clear.

There is nought now our feet on the highway delaying
  Save the friend's loving-kindness, the sundering of speech;
The well-willer's word that ends words with the saying,
  The loth to depart while each looketh on each.

Fare on then, for nought are ye laden with sorrow;
  The love of this land do ye bear with you still.
In two Dales of the earth for to-day and to-morrow
  Is waxing the oak-tree of peace and good-will.

Thus then they departed from Silverdale, even as men who were a portion thereof, and had not utterly left it behind. And that night they lay in the wild-wood not very far from the Dale's end; for they went softly, faring amongst so many friends.

CHAPTER LVI

TALK UPON THE WILD-WOOD WAY

On the morrow morning when they were on their way again Face-of-god left his own folk to go with the House of the Steer a while; and amongst them he

fell in with the Sun-beam going along with Bow-may. So they greeted him kindly, and Face-of-god fell into talk with the Sun-beam as they went side by side through a great oak-wood, where for a space was plain green-sward bare of all underwood.

So in their talk he said to her: "What deemest thou, my speech-friend, concerning our coming back to guest in Silverdale one day?"

"The way is long," she said.

"That may hinder us, but not stay us," said Face-of-god.

"That is sooth," said the Sun-beam.

Said Face-of-god: "What things shall stay us? Or deemest thou that we shall never see Silverdale again?"

She smiled: "Even so I think thou deemest, Gold-mane. But many things shall hinder us besides the long road!"

Said he: "Yea, and what things?"

"Thinkest thou," said the Sun-beam, "that the winning of Silver-stead is the last battle which thou shalt see?"

"Nay," said he, "nay."

"Shall thy Dale—our Dale—be free from all trouble within itself henceforward? Is there a wall built round it to keep out for ever storm, pestilence, and famine, and the waywardness of its own folk?"

"So it is as thou sayest," quoth Face-of-god, "and to meet such troubles and overcome them, or to die in strife with them, this is a great part of a man's life."

"Yea," she said, "and hast thou forgotten that thou art now a great chieftain, and that the folk shall look to thee to use thee many days in the year?"

He laughed and said: "So it is. How many days have gone by since I wandered in the wood last autumn, that the world should have changed so much!"

"Many deeds shall now be in thy days," she said, "and each deed as the corn of wheat from which cometh many corns; and a man's days on the earth are not over many."

"Then farewell, Silverdale!" said he, waving his hand toward the north. "War and trouble may bring me back to thee. but it maybe nought else shall. Farewell!"

She looked on him fondly but unsmiling, as he went beside her strong and warrior-like. Three paces from him went Bow-may, barefoot, in her white kirtle, but bearing her bow in her hand; a leash of arrows was in her girdle, her quiver hung at her back, and she was girt with a sword. On the other side went Wood-wont and Wood-wise, lightly clad but weaponed. Wood-mother was riding in an ox-wain just behind them, and Wood-father went beside her bearing an axe. Scattered all about them were the men of the Steer, gaily clad, bearing weapons, so that the oak-wood was bright with them, and the glades merry with their talk and singing and laughter, and before them down the glades went the banner of the Steer, and the White Beast led them the nearest way to Burgdale.

CHAPTER LVII

HOW THE HOST CAME HOME AGAIN

It was fourteen days before they came to Rosedale; for they had much baggage with them, and they had no mind to weary themselves, and the wood was nothing loathsome to them, whereas the weather was fair and bright for the more part. They fell in with no mishap by the way. But a score and three of runaways joined themselves to the Host, having watched their goings and wotting that they were not foemen.

Of these, some had heard of the overthrow of the Dusky Men in Silverdale, and others not. The Burgdalers received them all, for it seemed to them no great matter for a score or so of new-comers to the Dale.

But when the Host was come to Rosedale, they found it fair and lovely; and there they met with those of their folk who had gone with Dallach. But Dallach welcomed the kindreds with great joy, and bade them abide; for he said that they had the less need to hasten, since he had sent messengers into Burgdale to tell men there of the tidings. Albeit they were mostly loth to tarry; yet when he lay hard on them not to depart as men on the morrow of a gild-feast, they abode there three days, and were as well guested as might be, and on their departure they were laden with gifts from the wealth of Rosedale by Dallach and his folk.

Before they went their ways Dallach spake with Face-of-god and the chiefs of the Dalesmen, and said:

"Ye have given me much from the time when ye found me in the wood a naked wastrel; yet now I would ask you a gift to lay on the top of all that ye have given me."

Said Face-of-god: "Name the gift, and thou shalt have it; for we deem thee our friend."

"I am no less," said Dallach, "as in time to come I may perchance be able to show you. But now I am asking you to suffer a score or two of your men to abide here with me this summer, till I see how this folk new-born again is like to deal with me. For pleasure and a fair life have become so strange to them, that they scarce know what to do with them, or how to live; and unless all is to go awry, I must needs command and forbid; and though belike they love me, yet they fear me not; so that when my commandment pleaseth them, they do as I bid, and

when it pleaseth them not, they do contrary to my bidding; for it hath got into their minds that I shall in no case lift a hand against them, which indeed is the very sooth. But your folk they fear as warriors of the world, who have slain the Dusky Men in the Market-place of Silver-stead; and they are of alien blood to them, men who will do as their friend biddeth (think our folk) against them who are neither friends or foes. With such help I shall be well holpen."

In such wise spake Dallach; and Face-of-god and the chiefs said that so it should be, if men could be found willing to abide in Rosedale for a while. And when the matter was put abroad, there was no lack of such men amongst the younger warriors, who had noted that the dale was fair amongst dales and its women fairer yet amongst women.

So two score and ten of the Burgdale men abode in Rosedale, no one of whom was of more than twenty and five winters. Forsooth divers of them set up house in Rosedale, and never came back to Burgdale, save as guests. For a half score were wedded in Rosedale before the year's ending; and seven more, who had also taken to them wives of the goodliest of the Rosedale women, betook them the next spring to the Burg of the Runaways, and there built them a stead, and drew a garth about it, and dug and sowed the banks of the river, which they called Inglebourne. And as years passed, this same stead throve exceedingly, and men resorted thither both from Rosedale and Burgdale; for it was a pleasant place; and the land, when it was cured, was sweet and good, and the wood thereabout was full of deer of all kinds. So their stead was called Inglebourne after the stream; and in latter days it became a very goodly habitation of men.

Moreover, some of the once-enthralled folk of Rose-

dale, when they knew that men of their kindred from Silverdale were going home with the men of Burgdale to dwell in the Dale, prayed hard to go along with them; for they looked on the Burgdalers as if they were new Gods of the Earth. The Burgdale chiefs would not gainsay these men either, but took with them three score and ten from Rosedale, men and women, and promised them dwelling and livelihood in Burgdale.

So now with good hearts the Host of Burgdale turned their faces toward their well-beloved Dale; and they made good diligence, so that in three days' time they were come anigh the edge of the woodland wilderness. Thither in the even-tide, as they were making ready for their last supper and bed in the wood, came three men and two women of their folk, who had been abiding their coming ever since they had had the tidings of Silverdale and the battles from Dallach. Great was the joy of these messengers as they went from company to company of the warriors, and saw the familiar faces of their friends, and heard their wonted voices telling all the story of battle and slaughter. And for their part the men of the Host feasted these stay-at-homes, and made much of them. But one of them, a man of the House of the Face, left the Host a little after nightfall, and bore back to Burgstead at once the tidings of the coming home of the Host. Albeit since Dallach's tidings of victory had come to the Dale, the dwellers in the steads of the country-side had left Burgstead and gone home to their own houses; so that there was no great multitude abiding in the Thorp.

So early on the morrow was the Host astir; but ere they came to Wildlake's Way, the Shepherd-Folk turned aside westward to go home, after they had bidden farewell to their friends and fellows of the

Dale; for their souls longed for the sheep-cotes in the winding valleys under the long grey downs; and the garths where the last year's ricks shouldered up against the old stone gables, and where the daws were busy in the tall unfrequent ash-trees; and the green flowery meadows adown along the bright streams, where the crowfoot and the paigles were blooming now, and the harebells were in flower about the thorn-bushes at the down's foot, whence went the savour of their blossom over sheep-walk and water-meadow.

So these went their ways with many kind words; and two hours afterwards all the rest of the Host stood on the level ground of the Portway; but presently were the ranks of war disordered and broken up by the joy of the women and children, as they fell to drawing goodman or brother or lover out of the throng to the way that led speediest to their homesteads and halls. For the War-leader would not hold the Host together any longer, but suffered each man to go to his home, deeming that the men of Burgstead, and chiefly they of the Face and the Steer, would suffice for a company if any need were, and they would be easily gathered to meet any hap.

So now the men of the Middle and Lower Dale made for their houses by the road and the lanes and the meadows, and the men of the Upper Dale and Burgstead went their ways along the Portway toward their halls, with the throng of women and children that had come out to meet them. And now men came home when it was yet early, and the long day lay before them; and it was, as it were, made giddy and cumbered with the exceeding joy of return, and the thought of the day when the fear of death and sundering had been ever in their hearts. For these new hours were full of the kissing and embracing of lovers, and the

sweetness of renewed delight in beholding the fair bodies so sorely desired, and hearkening the soft wheedling of longed-for voices. There were the cups of friends beneath the chestnut trees, and the talk of the deeds of the fighting-men, and of the heavy days of the home-abiders; many a tale told oft and o'er again. There was the singing of old songs and of new, and the beholding the well-loved nook of the pleasant places, which death might well have made nought for them; and they were sweet with the fear of that which was past, and in their pleasantness was fresh promise for the days to come.

So amid their joyance came evening and nightfall; and though folk were weary with the fulness of delight, yet now for many their weariness led them to the chamber of love before the rest of deep night came to them to make them strong for the happy life to be begun again on the morrow.

House by house they feasted, and few were the lovers that sat not together that even. But Face-of-god and the Sun-beam parted at the door of the House of the Face; for needs must she go with her new folk to the House of the Steer, and needs must Face-of-god be amongst his own folk in that hour of high-tide, and sit beside his father beneath the image of the God with the ray-begirt head.

CHAPTER LVIII

HOW THE MAIDEN WARD WAS HELD IN BURGDALE

Now May was well worn when the Host came home to Burgdale; and on the very morrow of men's home-coming they began to talk eagerly of the Mid-summer Weddings, and how the Maiden Ward would be the greatest and fairest of all yet seen, whereas

battle and the deliverance from battle stir up the longing and love both of men and maidens; much also men spake of the wedding of Face-of-god and the Sun-beam; and needs must their wedding abide to the time of the Maiden Ward at Midsummer, and needs also must the Sun-beam go on the Ward with the other Brides of the Folk. So then must Face-of-god keep his soul in patience till those few days were over, doing what work came to hand; and he held his head high among the people, and was well looked to of every man.

In all matters the Sun-beam helped him, both in doing and in forbearing; and now so wonderful and rare was her beauty, that folk looked on her with somewhat of fear, as though she came from the very folk of the Gods.

Indeed she seemed somewhat changed from what she had been of late; she was sober of demeanour during these last days of her maidenhood, and sat amongst the kindred as one communing with herself: of few words she was and little laughter; but her face clear, not overcast by any gloom or shaken by passion: soft and kind was she in converse with others, and sweet were the smiles that came into her face if others' faces seemed to crave for them. For it must be said that as some folk eat out their hearts with fear of the coming evils, even so was she feeding her soul with the joy of the days to be, whatever trouble might fall upon them, whereof belike she foreboded some.

So wore the days toward Midsummer, when the wheat was getting past the blossoming, and the grass in the mown fields was growing deep green again after the shearing of the scythe; when the leaves were most and biggest; when the roses were beginning to fall; when the apples were reddening, and the skins

of the grape-berries gathering bloom. High aloft floated the light clouds over the Dale; deep blue showed the distant fells below the ice-mountains; the waters dwindled; all things sought the shadow by day-time, and the twilight of even and the twilight of dawn were but sundered by three hours of half-dark night.

So in the bright forenoon were seventeen brides assembled in the Gate of Burgstead (but of the rest of the Dale were twenty and three looked for), and with these was the Sun-beam, her face as calm as the mountain lake under a summer sunset, while of the others many were restless, and babbling like April throstles; and not a few talked to her eagerly, and in their restless love of her dragged her about hither and thither.

No men were to be seen that morning; for such was the custom, that the carles either departed to the fields and the acres, or abode within doors on the morn of the day of the Maiden Ward; but there was a throng of women about the Gate and down the street of Burgstead, and it may well be deemed that they kept not silence that hour.

So fared the Brides of Burgstead to the place of the Maiden Ward on the causeway, whereto were come already the other brides from steads up and down the Dale, or were even then close at hand on the way; and among them were Long-coat and her two fellows, with whom Face-of-god had held converse on that morning whereon he had followed his fate to the Mountain.

There then were they gathered under the cliff-wall of the Portway; and by the road-side had their grooms built them up bowers of green boughs to shelter them from the sun's burning, which were thatched with bulrushes, and decked with garlands of the fairest flowers of the meadows and the gardens.

Forsooth they were a lovely sight to look on, for no fairer women might be seen in the world; and the eldest of them was scant of five and twenty winters. Every maiden was clad in as goodly raiment as she might compass; their sleeves and gown-hems and girdles, yea, their very shoes and sandals were embroidered so fairly and closely, that as they shifted in the sun they changed colour like the king-fisher shooting from shadow to sunshine. According to due custom every maiden bore some weapon. A few had bows in their hands and quivers at their backs; some had nought but a sword girt to their sides; some bore slender-shafted spears, so as not to overburden their shapely hands; but to some it seemed a merry game to carry long and heavy thrust-spears, or to bear great war-axes over their shoulders. Most had their flowing hair coifed with bright helms; some had burdened their arms with shields; some bore steel hauberks over their linen smocks: almost all had some piece of war-gear on their bodies; and one, to wit, Steed-linden of the Sickle, a tall and fair damsel, was so arrayed that no garment could be seen on her but bright steel war-gear.

As for the Sun-beam, she was clad in a white kirtle embroidered from throat to hem with work of green boughs and flowers of the goodliest fashion, and a garland of roses on her head. Dale-warden himself was girt to her side by a girdle fair-wrought of golden wire, and she bore no other weapon or war-gear; and she let him lie quiet in his scabbard, nor touched the hilts once; whereas some of the other damsels would be ever drawing their swords out and thrusting them back. But all noted that goodly weapon, the yoke-fellow of so many great deeds.

There then on the Portway, between the water and the rock-wall, rose up plenteous and gleeful talk of

clear voices shrill and soft; and whiles the maidens sang, and whiles they told tales of old days, and whiles they joined hands and danced together on the sweet summer dust of the highway. Then they mostly grew aweary, and sat down on the banks of the road or under their leafy bowers.

Noon came, and therewithal goodwives of the neighbouring Dale, who brought them meat and drink, and fruit and fresh flowers from the teeming gardens; and thereafter for a while they nursed their joy in their bosoms, and spake but little and softly while the day was at its hottest in the early afternoon.

Then came out of Burgstead men making semblance of chapmen with a wain bearing wares, and they made as though they were wending down the Portway westward to go out of the Dale. Then arose the weaponed maidens and barred the way to them, and turned them back amidst fresh-springing merriment.

Again in a while, when the sun was westering and the shadows growing long, came herdsmen from down the Dale driving neat, and making as though they would pass by into Burgstead, but to them also did the maidens gainsay the road, so that needs must they turn back amidst laughter and mockery, they themselves also laughing and mocking.

And so at last, when the maidens had been all alone a while, and it was now hard on sunset, they drew together and stood in a ring, and fell to singing; and one Gold-may of the House of the Bridge, a most sweet singer, stood amidst their ring and led them. And this is somewhat of the meaning of their words:

The sun will not tarry; now changeth the light,
Fail the colours that marry the Day to the Night.

Amid the sun's burning bright weapons we bore,
For this eve of our earning comes once and no more.

For to-day hath no brother in yesterday's tide,
And to-morrow no other alike it doth hide.

This day is the token of oath and behest
That ne'er shall be broken through ill days and best.

Here the troth hath been given, the oath hath been done,
To the Folk that hath thriven well under the sun.

And the gifts of its giving our troth-day shall win
Are the Dale for our living and dear days therein.

O Sun, now thou wanest! yet come back and see
Amidst all that thou gainest how gainful are we.

O witness of sorrow wide over the earth,
Rise up on the morrow to look on our mirth!

Thy blooms art thou bringing back ever for men,
And thy birds are a-singing each summer again.

But to men little-hearted what winter is worse
Than thy summers departed that bore them the curse?

And e'en such art thou knowing where thriveth the year,
And good is all growing save thralldom and fear.

Nought such be our lovers' hearts drawing anigh,
While yet thy light hovers aloft in the sky.

Lo the seeker, the finder of Death in the Blade!
What lips shall be kinder on lips of mine laid?

Lo he that hath driven back tribes of the South!
Sweet-breathed is thine even, but sweeter his mouth.

Come back from the sea then, O sun! come aback,
Look adown, look on me then, and ask what I lack!

Come many a morrow to gaze on the Dale,
And if e'er thou seest sorrow remember its tale!

For 'twill be of a story to tell how men died
In the garnering of glory that no man may hide.

O sun sinking under! O fragrance of earth!
O heart! O the wonder whence longing has birth!

So they sang, and the sun sank indeed; and amidst their singing the eve was still about them, though there came a happy murmur from the face of the meadows and the houses of the Thorp aloof. But as their song fell they heard the sound of footsteps a many on the road; so they turned and stood with beating hearts in such order as when a band of the valiant draw together to meet many foes coming on them from all sides, and they stand back to back to face all comers. And even therewith, their raiment gleaming amidst the gathering dusk, came on them the young men of the Dale newly delivered from the grief of war.

Then in very deed the fierce mouths of the raisers of the war-shout were kind on the faces of tender maidens. Then went spear and axe and helm and shield clattering to the earth, as the arms of the new-comers went round about the bodies of the Brides, weary with the long day of sunshine, and glee and loving speech, and the maidens suffered the young men to lead them whither they would, and twilight began to draw round about them as the Maiden Band was sundered.

Some, they were led away westward down the Portway to the homesteads thereabout; and for divers of these the way was long to their halls, and they would have to wend over long stretches of dewy meadows, and hear the night-wind whisper in many a tree, and see the east begin to lighten with the dawn before they came to the lighted feast that awaited them. But some turned up the Portway straight towards Burgstead; and short was their road to the

halls where even now the lights were being kindled for their greeting.

As for the Sun-beam, she had been very quiet the day long, speaking as little as she might do, laughing not at all, and smiling for kindness' sake rather than for merriment; and when the grooms came seeking their maidens, she withdrew herself from the band, and stood alone amidst the road nigher to Burgstead than they; and her heart beat hard, and her breath came short and quick, as though fear had caught her in its grip; and indeed for one moment of time she feared that he was not coming to her. For he had gone with the other grooms to that gathered band, and had passed from one to the other, not finding her, till he had got him through the whole company, and beheld her awaiting him. Then indeed he bounded toward her, and caught her by the hands, and then by the shoulders, and drew her to him, and she nothing loth; and in that while he said to her:

"Come then, my friend; lo thou! they go each their own way toward the halls of their houses; and for thee have I chosen a way—a way over the foot-bridge yonder, and over the dewy meadows on this best even of the year."

"Nay, nay," she said, "it may not be. Surely the Burgstead grooms look to thee to lead them to the gate; and surely in the House of the Face they look to see thee before any other. Nay, Gold-mane, my dear, we must needs go by the Portway."

He said: "We shall be home but a very little while after the first, for the way I tell of is as short as the Portway. But hearken, my sweet! When we are in the meadows we shall sit down for a minute on a bank under the chestnut trees, and thence watch the moon coming up over the southern cliffs. And I shall behold thee in the summer night, and deem that I see

all thy beauty; which yet shall make me dumb with wonder when I see it indeed in the house amongst the candles."

"O nay," she said, "by the Portway shall we go; the torch-bearers shall be abiding thee at the gate."

Spake Face-of-god: "Then shall we rise up and wend first through a wide treeless meadow, wherein amidst the night we shall behold the kine moving about like odorous shadows; and through the greyness of the moonlight thou shalt deem that thou seest the pink colour of the eglantine blossoms, so fragrant they are."

"O nay," she said, "but it is meet that we go by the Portway."

But he said: "Then from the wide meadow come we into a close of corn, and then into an orchard-close beyond it. There in the ancient walnut-tree the owl sitteth breathing hard in the night-time; but thou shalt not hear him for the joy of the nightingales singing from the apple-trees of the close. Then from out of the shadowed orchard shall we come into the open town-meadow, and over its daisies shall the moonlight be lying in a grey flood of brightness.

"Short is the way across it to the brim of the Weltering Water, and across the water lieth the fair garden of the Face; and I have dight for thee there a little boat to waft us across the night-dark waters, that shall be like wavering flames of white fire where the moon smites them, and like the void of all things where the shadows hang over them. There then shall we be in the garden, beholding how the hall-windows are yellow, and hearkening the sound of the hall-glee borne across the flowers and blending with the voice of the nightingales in the trees. There then shall we go along the grass paths whereby the pinks and the cloves and the lavender are sending forth their fra-

grance, to cheer us, who faint at the scent of the overworn roses, and the honey-sweetness of the lilies.

"All this is for thee, and for nought but for thee this even; and many a blossom whereof thou knowest nought shall grieve if thy foot tread not thereby to-night; if the path of thy wedding which I have made, be void of thee, on the even of the Chamber of Love.

"But lo! at last at the garden's end is the yew-walk arched over for thee, and thou canst not see whereby to enter it; but I, I know it, and I lead thee into and along the dark tunnel through the moonlight, and thine hand is not weary of mine as we go. But at the end shall we come to a wicket, which shall bring us out by the gable-end of the Hall of the Face. Turn we about its corner then, and there are we blinking on the torches of the torch-bearers, and the candles through the open door, and the hall ablaze with light and full of joyous clamour, like the bale-fire in the dark night kindled on a ness above the sea by fisher-folk remembering the Gods."

"O nay," she said, "but by the Portway must we go; the straightest way to the Gate of Burgstead."

In vain she spake, and knew not what she said; for even as he was speaking he led her away, and her feet went as her will went, rather than her words; and even as she said that last word she set her foot on the first board of the foot-bridge; and she turned aback one moment, and saw the long line of the rock-wall yet glowing with the last of the sunset of midsummer, while as she turned again, lo! before her the moon just beginning to lift himself above the edge of the southern cliffs, and betwixt her and him all Burgdale, and Face-of-god moreover.

Thus then they crossed the bridge into the green meadows, and through the closes and into the garden of the Face and unto the Hall-door; and other brides

and grooms were there before them (for six grooms had brought home brides to the House of the Face); but none deemed it amiss in the War-leader of the folk and the love that had led him. And old Stone-face said: "Too many are the rows of bee-skeps in the gardens of the Dale that we should begrudge wayward lovers an hour's waste of candle-light."

So at last those twain went up the sun-bright Hall hand in hand in all their loveliness, and up on to the dais, and stood together by the middle seat; and the tumult of the joy of the kindred was hushed for a while as they saw that there was speech in the mouth of the War-leader.

Then he spread his hands abroad before them all and cried out: "How then have I kept mine oath, whereas I swore on the Holy Boar to wed the fairest woman of the world?"

A mighty shout went rattling about the timbers of the roof in answer to his word; and they that looked up to the gable of the Hall said that they saw the ray-ringed image of the God smile with joy over the gathered folk.

But spake Iron-face unheard amidst the clamour of the Hall: "How fares it now with my darling and my daughter, who dwelleth amongst strangers in the land beyond the wild-wood?"

CHAPTER LIX

THE BEHEST OF FACE-OF-GOD TO THE BRIDE ACCOMPLISHED: A MOTE-STEAD APPOINTED FOR THE THREE FOLKS, TO WIT, THE MEN OF BURGDALE, THE SHEPHERDS, AND THE CHILDREN OF THE WOLF

THREE years and two months thereafter, three hours after noon in the days of early autumn, came a wain

tilted over with precious webs of cloth, and drawn by eight white oxen, into the market-place of Silver-stead: two score and ten of spearmen of the tallest, clad in goodly war-gear, went beside it, and much people of Silverdale thronged about them. The wain stayed at the foot of the stair that led up to the door of the Mote-house, and there lighted down therefrom a woman goodly of fashion, with wide grey eyes, and face and hands brown with the sun's burning. She had a helm on her head and a sword girt to her side, and in her arms she bore a yearling child.

And there was come Bow-may with the second man-child born to Face-of-god.

She stayed not amidst the wondering folk, but hastened up the stair, which she had once seen running with the blood of men: the door was open, and she went in and walked straightway, with the babe in her arms, up the great Hall to the dais.

There were men on the dais: amidmost sat Folk-might, little changed since the last day she had seen him, yet fairer, she deemed, than of old time; and her heart went forth to meet the Chieftain of her Folk, and the glad tears started in her eyes and ran down her cheeks as she drew near to him.

By his side sat the Bride, and her also Bow-may deemed to have waxed goodlier. Both she and Folk-might knew Bow-may ere she had gone half the length of the hall; and the Bride rose up in her place and cried out Bow-may's name joyously.

With these were sitting the elders of the Wolf and the Woodlanders, the more part of whom Bow-may knew well.

On the dais also stood aside a score of men weaponed, and looking as if they were awaiting the word which should send them forth on some errand.

Now stood up Folk-might and said: "Fair greeting

and love to my friend and the daughter of my Folk! How farest thou, Bow-may, best of all friendly women? How fareth my sister, and Face-of-god my brother? and how is it with our friends and helpers in the goodly Dale?"

Said Bow-may: "It is well both with all those and with me; and my heart laughs to see thee, Folk-might, and to look on the elders of the valiant, and our lovely sister the Bride. But I have a message for thee from Face-of-god: wilt thou that I deliver it here?"

"Yea surely," said Folk-might, and came forth and took her hand, and kissed her cheeks and her mouth. The Bride also came forth and cast her arms about her, and kissed her; and they led her between them to a seat on the dais beside Folk-might.

But all men looked on the child in her arms and wondered what it was. But Bow-may took the babe, which was both fair and great, and set it on the knees of the Bride, and said:

"Thus saith Face-of-god: 'Friend and kinswoman, well-beloved playmate, the gift which thou badest of me in sorrow do thou now take in joy, and do all the good thou wouldest to the son of thy friend. The ring which I gave thee once in the garden of the Face, give thou to Bow-may, my trusty and well-beloved, in token of the fulfilment of my behest.'"

Then the Bride kissed Bow-may again, and fell to fondling of the child, which was loth to leave Bow-may.

But she spake again: "To thee also, Folk-might, I have a message from Face-of-god, who saith: 'Mighty warrior, friend and fellow, all things thrive with us, and we are happy. Yet is there a hollow place in our hearts which grieveth us, and only thou and thine may amend it. Though whiles we hear tell of thee, yet we

see thee not, and fain were we, might we see thee, and wot if the said tales be true. Wilt thou help us somewhat herein, or wilt thou leave us all the labour? For sure we be that thou wilt not say that thou rememberest us no more, and that thy love for us is departed.' This is his message, Folk-might, and he would have an answer from thee."

Then laughed Folk-might and said: "Sister Bow-may, seest thou these weaponed men hereby?"

"Yea," she said.

Said he: "These men bear a message with them to Face-of-god my brother. Crow the Shaft-speeder, stand forth and tell thy friend Bow-may the message I have set in thy mouth, every word of it."

Then Crow stood forth and greeted Bow-may friendly, and said: "Friend Bow-may, this is the message of our Alderman: 'Friend and helper, in the Dale which thou hast given to us do all things thrive; neither are we grown old in three years' wearing, nor are our memories worsened. We long sore to see you and give you guesting in Silverdale, and one day that shall befall. Meanwhile, know this: that we of the Wolf and the Woodland, mindful of the earth that bore us, and the pit whence we were digged, have a mind to go see Shadowy Vale once in every three years, and there to hold high-tide in the ancient Hall of the Wolf, and sit in the Doom-ring of our Fathers. But since ye have joined yourselves to us in battle, and have given us this Dale, our health and wealth, without price and without reward, we deem you our very brethren, and small shall be our hall-glee, and barren shall our Doom-ring seem to us, unless ye sit there beside us. Come then, that we may rejoice each other by the sight of face and sound of voice; that we may speak together of matters that concern our welfare; so that we three Kindreds may become

one Folk. And if this seem good to you, know that we shall be in Shadowy Vale in a half-month's wearing. Grieve us not by forbearing to come.' Lo, Bow-may, this is the message, and I have learned it well, for well it pleaseth me to bear it."

Then said Folk-might: "What sayest thou to the message, Bow-may?"

"It is good in all ways," said she, "but is it timely? May our folk have the message and get to Shadowy Vale, so as to meet you there?"

"Yea surely," said Folk-might, "for our kinsmen here shall take the road through Shadowy Vale, and in four days' time they shall be in Burgdale, and as thou wottest, it is scant a two days' journey thence to Shadowy Vale."

Therewith he turned to these men again, and said: "Kinsman Crow, depart now, and use all diligence with thy message."

So the messengers began to stir; but Bow-may cried out: "Ho! Folk-might, my friend, I perceive thou art little changed from the man I knew in Shadowy Vale, who would have his dinner before the fowl were plucked. For shall I not go back with these thy messengers, so that I also may get all ready to wend to the Mote-house of Shadowy Vale?"

But the Bride looked kindly on her, and laughed and said: "Sister Bow-may, his meaning is that thou shouldest abide here in Silverdale till we depart for the Folk-thing, and then go thither with us; and this I also pray thee to do, that thou mayst rejoice the hearts of thine old friends; and also that thou mayst teach me all that I should know concerning this fair child of my brother and my sister."

And she looked on her so kindly as she caressed the babe, that Bow-may's heart melted, and she cried out:

"Would that I might never depart from the house wherein thou dwellest. O Bride of my Kinsman! And this that thou biddest me is easy and pleasant for me to do. But afterwards I must get me back to Burgdale; for I seem to have left much there that calleth for me."

"Yea," said Folk-might, "and art thou wedded, Bow-may? Shalt thou never bend the yew in battle again?"

Said Bow-may soberly: "Who knoweth, chieftain? Yea, I am wedded now these two years; and nought I looked for less when I followed those twain through the wild-wood to Burgdale."

She sighed therewith, and said: "In all the Dale there is no better man of his hands than my man, nor any goodlier to look on, and he is even that Hart of Highcliff whom thou knowest well, O Bride!"

Said the Bride: "Thou sayest sooth, there is no better man in the Dale."

Said Bow-may: "Sun-beam bade me wed him when he pressed hard upon me." She stayed awhile, and then said: "Face-of-god also deemed I should not naysay the man: and now my son by him is of like age to this little one."

"Good is thy story," said Folk-might; "or deemest thou, Bow-may, that such strong and goodly women as thou, and women so kind and friendly, should forbear the wedding and the bringing forth of children? Yea, and we who may even yet have to gather to another field before we die, and fight for life and the goods of life."

"Thou sayest well," she said: "all that hath befallen me is good since the day whereon I loosed shaft from the break of the bent over yonder."

Therewith she fell a-musing, and made as though she were hearkening to the soft voice of the Bride caressing

the new-come baby; but in sooth neither heard nor saw what was going on about her, for her thoughts were in bygone days. Howbeit presently she came to herself again, and fell to asking many questions concerning Silverdale and the kindred, and those who had once been thralls of the Dusky Men; and they answered all duly, and told her the whole story of the Dale since the Day of the Victory.

So Bow-may and the carles who had come with her abode for that half-month in Silverdale, guested in all love by the folk thereof, both the kindreds and the poor folk. And Bow-may deemed that the Bride loved Face-of-god's child little less than her own, whereof she had two, a man and a woman; and thereat was she full of joy, since she knew that Face-of-god and the Sun-beam would be fain thereof.

Thereafter, when the time was come, fared Folk-might and the Bride, and many of the elders and warriors of the Wolf and the Woodland, to Shadowy Vale; and Dallach and the best of Rosedale went with them, being so bidden; and Bow-may and her following, according to the word of the Bride. And in Shadowy Vale they met Face-of-god and Alderman Iron-face, and the chiefs of Burgdale and the Shepherds, and many others; and great joy there was at the meeting. And the Sun-beam remembered the word which she spoke to Face-of-god when first he came to Shadowy Vale, that she would be wishful to see again the dwelling wherein she had passed through so much joy and sorrow of her younger days. But if anyone were fain of this meeting, the Alderman was glad above all, when he took the Bride once more in his arms, and caressed her whom he had deemed should be a very daughter of his House.

Now telleth the tale of all these kindreds, to wit, the Men of Burgdale and the Sheepcotes; and the Children

of the Wolf, and the Woodlanders, and the Men of Rosedale, that they were friends henceforth, and became as one Folk, for better or worse, in peace and in war, in waning and waxing: and that whatsoever befell them, they ever held Shadowy Vale a holy place, and for long and long after they met there in mid-autumn, and held converse and counsel together.

No more as now telleth the Tale of these Kindreds and Folks, but maketh an Ending.

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